SIGNET

Literary Magazine

2019

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LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Hey friends,

As the semester winds down, I cannot begin to express my sheer amazement at the talent of the Queens student body and the cohesiveness of the Signet staff. (I think we all say something similar to this every year, but still. Y'all rock.) It has truly been a joy to read through all of these pieces with such a great team.

Endless thanks to the leadership board for a project this ambitious. Think about it: in your hands is a compilation of student art across genres, created by students across majors, and curated by, you guessed it, the students. (It's pretty cool.) Professor Renfroe, thank you for your unwavering dedication and guidance for us Signeteers. Elisabeth, thank you for your drive and organization. And Ben, thank you for the hours you spent googling how to work InDesign on our behalf. (Seriously. Thanks.)

If there are any other parting words I can find for you all picking up this copy, I hope you will keep immersing yourself in art. I hope that the things that you find joy in, you keep doing. As artists, life will try to berate you for pursuing your passions. (Don't let it.) Joseph Campbell once said, "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek." Whatever you do, don't let fear of failure or rejection stop you from creating.

Write on,
Megan Rosenthal

LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Hello everyone,

I sure am happy you decided to pick this up. A lot of sweat and tears went into making this magazine happen...more so than usual anyway. I am incredibly grateful that we were able to make this literary magazine happen every year. It takes a lot of work and dedication from everyone; not just the Signet Staff, but also everyone who submits!

Thank you so much for submitting your amazing work and I do apologize we can't include every voice in this magazine, but we do our best to try! Everyone is so incredibly talented in something whether you believe me or not. So thank you again for submitting, and thank you to the Signet staff for working hard at choosing what to include and doing their fair share of editing. I also wanted to thank Megan and Elisabeth for their constant support and help. Without all of these things this magazine would not be here today.

I personally put a lot into this particular edition fo Signet so I truly hope you like it! I hope everyone keeps submitting and keeps writing and keep creating! It is so incredibly important because those are the things that live beyond us and it is our responsibility to leave our mark somehow and someway. Have fun reading this edition!

Keep being kind,

Ben Ruiz

LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Dear Queens Readers,

I cannot begin to express the sheer joy I have gained from viewing the talented work of each writer and artist that submitted to the 2019 edition of Signet. This magazine would not be possible without your dedication to the arts and commitment to your individual passions. So, for that, thank you for all you do!

To the Signet staff whose hard work and time has made this magazine possible, it has been an absolute privilege to work with each one of you, and I hope this will be an experience that continues to influence you outside of the classroom walls.

The leadership staff that I have served under deserve the biggest thanks for their unwavering faith in this magazine. Megan Rosenthal, your leadership and friendship has been a priceless gift to me throughout this semester, and we will miss you dearly as you continue your life journey as a college graduate. Professor Renfroe, thank you for your continued support and guidance. It is, without a doubt, most invaluable. Ben, thank you for walking this path with me and giving me the chance to collaborate with an amazing friend. I look forward to continuing this journey with you next year.

Lastly, thank YOU, reader, for encouraging us and loving this magazine as much as we do. There would be no Signet without its readers. I hope you see reflections of yourself in the pages of this magazine, and that you continue to let it influence you for years to come.

Happy reading,
Elisabeth King

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Interview with Chip Decker of the Actor's Theatre of Charlotte

Anais Hawkins

Queens has constantly involved themselves in the community, but how many know that we host a 30 year legacy, Actor's Theater right on campus? Signet Magazine spoke with the executive director Chris Decker to discuss the changing times of the arts, the threats, the future and the community at Hadley Theater.

Anais: How would you define the arts?

Chip: That's a big question is I think I'm going to sum it up with one word. And that's change.... It should be the voice of change. It should be the result of gene. So I think if I'm going to, I think that's the best way to do is sum it up in a quick change. Artists Change and change is good. That's what they always say. Like they got to keep moving forward. It's right.

Anais: So when people walk from the theater, what would you like them to walk away with?

Chip: Um, you know, every show is different, right?....so when people walk away, I want them entertained and if they're entertained I'm wanting that to lead to discussions....And if it's something important, again, change, did it change? Did it change their way of thinking? Um, even, even if it's briefly, even if it's like, wow, that's, I never thought of it from that person's perspective before. I still don't agree with it, but I, I never thought of it that way. And even that little inkling of change, right, is what you hope for. People will at least have listened in weight, both sides instead of coming at it.

Anais: Like how do you involve the community into, to your place?

Chip: This is just coming up on our first year here. Really our first solid year. There should be no barriers. My hope is that if a college campus, the university campus safe for everyone and inclusive for everyone, then the theater on that canvas is better. So you've got to break down barriers to get here. Whether it's transportation, whether it's a location, whatever the case may be, you can't have barriers and you can't have any kind of exclusiveness. It's got be art.

Anais: Now we're in a pretty high end area with million dollar homes. Do you think that the theater still holds that stigma that only the higher economic families can enjoy the theater, whereas the lower go to the movie theaters, the arcade, do you see that stigma still exists.

Chip: Um, it's tough because there is an inherent stigma on art sometimes that, "oh, it's not for me, or it's too expensive, or that's over in that neighborhood," We are in a very affluent area, but we've made it very clear over our 30 years is that our programming is all varied voices, people all have skin in the game here. And we've worked very hard on accessibility that we have our Pay What You Can evening programs starting probably 25 years ago. If somebody comes in off the cat's bus line and they have to have their $3.50 to get back home and they've only got a $5 bill, then that $1.50 they have for admission is what we'll take, but they'll pay if they don't have anything in their pocket, they're still going to see your show. We don't turn anybody away regardless of socio economic statute. Our next two nights, our tickets are more than half price off the folks that may have a little bit more, um, but they don't have a $30 ticket in or they want to bring family or whatever the case. So we have a structured role now of the place. What good is telling somebody's story, if that's somebody can't be there, right? If you can't see yourself on the stage because you don't have the price of a ticket, then

I've failed isn't as a producer.

Anais: So do you think plays like the Hamilton have started a resurgence in theater interest? Um, and can you name any other plays that I've done this in regards to the younger, less rich, uh, audience?

Chip: I think theater knows that its audience is a huge, broad scope of those folks. Hamilton's been great for, yeah, Hampton's done extraordinarily well in that always seems to be an excitement about new theater and musicals. But they also realize that if you're going to do a show about immigration and the way the country was built, you can't do that on $600 tickets. So they came up with fair, their lottery system, which they, it's done in every single city. It's still going right now in New York. I think they're 40 best seats in the house - the ones that are right up front, um, go on a lottery every day and they're 10 bucks. You have to win the lottery. But still, I mean, the opportunity to see Hamilton for 10 bucks, that's pretty awesome. And they don't have to do that. They can sell those tickets for a thousand. But I think, Lin-Manuel Miranda is the smart one. He saw we got to work hard to keep it accessible for everybody. Again, if we're telling somebody's story and, they're not in the conversation, we're not doing it.

Anais: So do you think thing mediums like television, film are taking over a theater or do you think they're adding to it?

Chip: I think we're seeing a sort of renaissance period or resurgence of theater because of all the television. It's a great time. It's a great time for writers because people demand really good content... when you're in an audience and in your actors are alive and your audience as well because the feedback its's electric, it's a media. You don't get that with film and you don't get that with television and you don't get that with any other medium other than when you're in a room and you feel the person next to you, excitement that you're sharing, that they're

sharing. It's communal. It's electric and it's right then and there and there's nothing else. You can see great movies, you know, there's tons of great movies out there and you're going to enjoy them, but you're not sharing anything with those actors.

Anais: So what are you as a, as a producer, what do you put, what do you do a role in all of us?

Chip: My role is to bring the best possible theater to the city that I can I've been with this company since 1996 from that of a technical director when I was first hired. I became the artistic director in 2001, I became the executive director in 16. So I've been here a long time. It's been almost 40 years. Yeah. I'm doing it to finally get where I'm where I'm at today, but I've enjoyed every step for sure.

Anais: Yeah. Well last question. Where do you, where does Hadley Theater go from here?

Chip: Hopefully we raise the status of the Hadley. We're excited to be in this neighborhood. We're excited to be in the city. We're excited part of the whole university. We're really excited to be associated with Queens. My hope is that as we progress, we will find different ways to integrate programs into the theater like the creative writing program. It's like how does the creative writing program and our new voices, new play festival, how do they mesh? And you hit it on, on early. You're like, I know that I'm a good writer, I know what I'm doing, but I don't know how to network. I don't know how to make connections with agents. I don't know how to do this. And we're bringing in writers who I have the age and already do this. This is how I get ahold of people.

Like Swings

Laura Branham

The tips of your fingers
Brush the rim of my
Lacy
Black
Underwear-

I wore just for you.

You pull my back tight,
Anchoring your lips with mine.
I inhale as small goosebumps
Run, charging along my hips
As your hand follows.

I'm taken back, in this one
Intimate, climactic moment of touch
Your fingers, playing a melody
Over
And over,
My body.

I'm swinging-
My feet held high
Towards the sun.
I climb higher
And higher, feet dangling
Head swung back.

I'm little again,

With hair waving.
Weightless,
I fall back and forth.
Suspended between
Giggles and goosebumps.

And your hands
Warm, familiar
Chase the melody,
Once more
Around my ear.

Back and forth,
Back and forth
Swinging.

Emily: A Letter to an Old Friend

Cameron Turnbull

Emily,
Do you remember me?
We were neighbors
Once upon a time.
I'd tip-toe 'round
The poison ivy
And climb over a fence
To reach your house
When we were kids.
I don't remember everything
From all those
Photo-album days,
Just that we were there
Together like
Sidekick vigilantes.
Like damaged strips of film,
My memory can only
Play certain scenes.
Once,
You were upset with me
And I apologized
Using a little dog stuffed animal.
It made you laugh
And you forgave me.
In the backseat
Of the car that I now drive,
You and I played Kirby
On my GameBoy.
This was when I didn't know

That girls could like video games
As much as me.
The last time I saw you
Was over a decade ago.
Can you believe that?
I'm not old enough to feel
This old.
You chased me 'round
The car to give me a hug
Goodbye.
I still thought girls were icky then,
So I ran and tried to hide.
How would things be different
If we'd been talking all these years?
In what ways would
Certain things still be kept the same?
Emily,
Do you remember me?
I really hope you do.
If this poem finds you somehow,
I hope that you'll find me.

The Line
Mabry Busby

After a couple drinks, your words were slurred.
You looked at me the way you weren't allowed
and said what you should not have said out loud:
"The line that we can't cross has gotten blurred."

I looked at you, unsure of what I'd heard.
I don't know why you chose to lift this shroud,
to split and splinter our unspoken vow.
I just looked at you; I couldn't say a word.

You coughed, the silence smothering the air
shattering into pieces on the ground.
You looked away, our suffocating stare
broken. Had we just lost, or had we found?

You laughed and shook it off, making a joke,
and suddenly, it's like you never spoke.

Pyomania

Nia Murat

Justin stared at the flames devouring the curtains of his house with quiet amusement. He and Jason had always hated those curtains, with their bright blue tulips flowing up the side of the plain, white window frame of his plain, white house. They looked so much better with the red flames licking up the blue, turning it to beautiful ash near his wiggling toes.

"Justin, what did you do?" His mom screamed, running from their living room the moment she smelled the smoke. Justin just cradled the long lighter, the one they normally used to light the grill out on the hunk of concrete they called a patio. Justin didn't move, simply flicked the flame on the lighter in and out of existence, passing his gaze lovingly between his sources of light.

Justin had always loved lighters. He got his first one just a year ago as his seventh birthday present from his older brother. He would flick it on and off for hours, watching the tiny light shine and play and dance with his breathing. Justin was hypnotized. He would always volunteer to light candles when the power went out, wait to blow out his birthday cake until the last second, stare into his fireplace until he couldn't see. His mom didn't like it, she thought it weird, scary even. Justin didn't care. She didn't need to know about all the things he'd let dance within his pretty little flame.

His mom came crashing back into the room, just in time to see Justin reach the lighter out and touch it gingerly to the other curtain and then the couch. He wanted to see more of the house shine so beautifully, so brightly. His mother screeched again.

"Justin, what in the hell? You need to stop now!" She held something red in her trembling hands, pointing the dark nozzle at the curtains, but staring at her son.

He looked up at her blankly. "Why? Isn't it so pretty? The light is so warm." He took in a long breath, the heavy smoke expanding in his lungs and escaping in a soft cough. Justin tilted his head back and smiled, flicking the lighter to life again.

His mother did not appreciate the display. She grabbed his arm with one hand, the other still gripping the fire extinguisher. Her hand was tight, so tight he could feel it in his muscles. It was tighter than it had been the one and only time Justin had tried to run away. He was calmly walking out the front door, backpack full of fruit snacks and Capri Sun, determined to follow in his brother's footsteps and never return. She'd seen him from the living room and sprung up from the couch, snatching up his arm with the force of a bear trap. His mom's hand was even tighter this time, the bruising fingers pulling him away from his beautiful fire and forcefully tearing away his lighter. He wailed. She ignored him.

"Stop it! Stop it now! Give it back to me!" The fire alarm, finally blaring to life, echoed his cry, but neither of them could stop the destruction of Justin's creation. His mother heartlessly snuffed the life from his exquisite fire, spraying down the flickering flames with suffocating foam. The spray from the extinguisher wouldn't cease until every bit of fire and ash were buried and gone in deflating clouds of white.

Justin stopped making noise, staring at the space where his flame once was, cold creeping into his limbs. It was at least eighty-degrees in their Arizona home, but snow was holding Justin's limbs in place as he just stared and stared. He didn't notice the way his mother held his hand, tender and not so tight, or the way she got on her knees and pleaded that he couldn't do this, he couldn't keep playing with fire, he couldn't keep acting out, he couldn't do the same things his brother would do, he couldn't be like Jason, he couldn't be Jason. Justin just stood their dumbly, the cold numbing everything.

Existential Dharma and its Repercussions

Evan Boyer

Guru

The human experience transcends all but the nature of enlightenment apropos to the existence of aesthetics; though the conjecture of the dogma eroticizes principles that may or may not exemplify the ideology of justice. Various principalities of absolute Brahma associated with the transfiguration of ethics are questionable at best, although they do not conflict with the metaphysical properties of non-existential Dharma. However, absolute Brahma and non-existential Dharma are only juxtaposed in cases of severe agricultural crisis. These findings have been subject to unparalleled scrutiny and skepticism through the practice of microaggressions, but upheld with great fortitude by the Darwinian mechanism. The neurological effects of an excessive intake of non-existential Dharma are profound. The equilibrium of the human psyche is irreparably damaged by indulgences that frustrate the encoding of the id and the superego, however, their effect on the ego has proven an insurmountable challenge to observe. Workers disagree due to a lack various forms of non-existential research. True ethic maintains that abduction is achieved only when the psyche converges, often asexually, to distill and excrete the damage imposed by the ego. Unfortunately, children are far more prone to hypothetical abduction then the remainder of the populace, due to the often intense nature of their oral fixation, however, absolute Dharma can be attained through the child's inert oral capability. Although this method is very controversial, it is effective in reviving the child's formerly unborn superego.

Interplanetary Diksha necessitates the distribution

of premium judicial serums among certain metaphorical communities; these communities are largely responsible for the secretion of Bhrama.

I've Walked the Streets

Megan Rosenthal

I've walked the streets that Shakespeare sauntered on.
I've downed a pint and chased it with a pie
I got for free on a playhouse street. John
Keats and I sat on a seat so why
Can't I have literary genius pour
Out from my pen attached to hands, my own.
The beauty London bleeds in line and lore,
It's pierced my eyes but died before it flows
Onto a page signed with my name. I'm just
A sponge. I've soaked it in instead of steep
Adventure tea to seep my words. They rust
Instead, remain unsaid, lying underneath
Tradition. I've realized the artist's pain.
They did it first. You'll never be the same.

Dear New York City

Leslie Castillo

For the Bronx to Brooklyn, to Queens, to Manhattan,

This isn't to say goodbye, that I love you with all that I have.
I am undeniably underprepared to face what lies ahead for me.
But I know that you will always welcome me back.
This is not a "goodbye" forever--more like 5 years tops.
How could I resist your efforts to keep me?
However, I am ready to go.
I know that I have been crying wolf
About 6-7 years, 8 now, for almost a decade really.
This time, I might actually do so.
It's not like I want to leave you, it's just that I am not growing
In our relationship as you are.
You are always growing and changing for the best,
and I feel the same.
Like nothing has changed.
So I must go, and let you out of my sight for a while.
Until I am ready to come home to you
We have been through so much together;
We have seen too much as well.
Please understand that I don't wish to upset you.
You have kept me tethered to my world in so many
Positive ways possible.
Although you can be irrational, and drastic and insensitive
You will always be different.
You will always shine like you should
One day my love, you and I will shine together.

With love, and my heart,
The girl who went to pursue her BA elsewhere

Car Cnversation

Ally Bush

Behind the wheel on Wando Bridge, and I
Am entranced by the sunlight on the sea.
A mother, knowing I would crucify,
A daughter, never knowing what to be.

Recline on concrete incline, an inkling
In the sky above and the space, on wheels,
Between their heads. But what is she thinking?
They reach the crest and then everything feels

Like theirs. And there? And they're just sitting on
The gentle curve of Earth. The car rolls down,
Her white suburban, I contract her yawn.
Silence. Sirens. The marsh not green but brown.

And I remember when I called her "mom"
Instead of "mommy." Power in a name,
My adolescence commenced like a bomb.
The bridge is gone, and so is she, a shame.

At other times in other cars, we talked
About the past, the old home on the hill,
My budding future, conversations locked
Inside the car. We drive. The sky is still.

The Glorious Turk

Evan Boyer

I'm twenty-six, single, and I use my exceptional bowling talent as a justification for my otherwise tepid life. Instead of drugs, I use the underappreciated sport as my adult pacifier every time things inevitably go wrong. At my local alley, they call me the Turk, because the screen of whatever lane I'm at is sure to display nothing but Turkeys so long as I occupy it. Every strike I get is a stab of the throttle of some ethereal vehicle, yanking me out of my ditch of sorrow. I drop jaws, at the lanes.

I have my own personalized bowling ball. It weighs fifteen pounds, and my loopy, golden signature is carved pretty deep into the side. While this method of personalization detracts mildly from the balance and ballistic integrity of the ball, it's fine because I can compensate for the imperfection. You know how all those old cathedrals in Europe are built with some sort of flaw, so as to not challenge God with their grandiosity? I've done that, with my bowling ball.

But skill in something as irrelevant as bowling doesn't bleed into everyday life, although I constantly try, seemingly in vain, to bargain with God for it to be so. If I was as good at picking up chicks as I am at bowling, I would write off Hugh Hefner as a hopeless, socially handicapped quack.

After countless nighttime hours of laying on my creaky futon in my stinky apartment, trying to deconstruct my vague, yet pungent, resentment at the world and its inhabitants, I've concluded that it stems from envy of my father. When my dad was my age, twenty-six, he was already so proficient in basic life skills that he had moved onto painfully non-essential things such as hot air ballooning and Bonsai (every time I see one of those trim, cute little trees a pang of hurt enters my body and

my heart starts working overtime-KA-THUNK, KA-THUNK, KA-THUNK (I'll take some hypertension, unmedicated). Anyway, I'm taking the opposite approach my dad did; I'm starting with the non-essentials, such as bowling and drinking, and if I'm lucky I'll master the basics right when my back starts giving out or I have my first stroke.

I've been hitting the bars lately, on the weekends after bowling. Drunkenness always brings out the passion in someone, and I routinely have to struggle to shut up about bowling and its nuances. When I've semi-successfully accomplished that, and had about five beers, then I'll crack my fingers and begin sloppily flirting with all those girls I know only vaguely, offering undercooked and backhanded "compliments" such as: "wow, I never realized you were so pretty." The Irksome Flirt, Liam the bartender calls me. All I can do is smile, twiddle the straw in my drink, and feel my heart knocking with all the virulence of my tired old Pontiac Grand Prix.

That's where I was on Christmas Eve-the bar. It was done up gaily with that plastic tinsel that raises the same kind of question a grotesque boob job raises-why? It's fitting, though, being fake. A bar, I've deducted after shamelessly observing others with an eye blurred yet cleared by drink, is an outpost of fakeness-sometimes blatant, other times subtle. A friend of mine (in the sense that we inhabit the same bar and drink at the same time and drink similar drinks) got off with a totally gorgeous but irredeemably ditzy twenty-two year old blonde by convincing her that he was a prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson trial. He is around my age. He pulls stunts like this every weekend, to "see how far he can take it." I asked him yesterday who he plans to masquerade as next, and he told me with a toxic, look-at-my-success smile, "GQ editor." KA-THUNK, KA-THUNK, KA-THUNK. I looked at him, the product of a young society in which one's standing on the social strata is dictated by the popularity of one's penis, and found myself telling him about bowling; he shifted uncomfortably and yes, I loved it. He's not here tonight, though. Probably with family, or struggling with a passionate

case of gonorrhea.

I left the bar at about midnight, because it was largely empty. I halfway expected a melancholy soundtrack to be birthed from the air surrounding my head, one with a lonesome slide guitar wailing and a brusque man mourning a country woman's curves or something. It didn't happen. All I did was pay my tab, wish Liam a most Merry Christmas, and step out into the silent, cutting winter air. I went back to my apartment, put on a movie, tumbled onto my futon that shrieked when I did so, and fell into a surprisingly untroubled sleep punctuated by idyllic dreams of my freshly polished ball spinning frictionless on the ceramic-smooth hardwood, crashing amiably into the deliciously cream colored pins, gracing my wax-encrusted ears with their congratulatory pockety-pock-pock sound, the sound of hope. Snow fell outside.

Today, Christmas, I find my liquor buzzed self-sauntering up the bowling alley parking lot, basking in the wizened light of the thirty-year-old neon animation above the entrance in which a ball choppily shifts, shifts, and ultimately "knocks" over crude neon pins that, a split second later, light up again to repeat the process again, sure as clockwork. My bag, nestled neatly into my arm, houses my ball and shoes, a comforting weight that reminds me why I'm here at the lanes, and, you know, on earth.

I push the door open, and the glorious sounds and smells of the lanes rush to greet me, their unspoken master. Fried foods, spilled beer, musty shoes that are the subject of countless jokes about warts and foot fungus. Those shrieking laughs that unexpected strikes tend to illicit, those resigned darn its and dang its and damn its that result from the gutters claiming yet another victim. The sudden, creamy clap of a determined ball hitting the hardwood, the comical pose of he who launched it, suspended, anticipatory, waiting for the big victory or defeat. I go up to the counter, and pay my dollar. Colin's working. Colin looks sort of like a Bull Terrier, with taught skin nearly concealing his eyes. The slivers of his eyes that are visible light up at my entry, nonetheless. He speaks loudly, reverentially.

"Turk! Hey! Ready to roll?" He asks, performing a sweeping, bowling gesture that

ends with him hitting his hand quite hard on the underside of the grimy, tacky counter.

"Duh." I say, passing by him, holding up my bag like it was a glass of fine champagne, conveying in that gesture a promise that he'll see some shit tonight. But he, along with every other lanegoer who knows me, has come to expect excellence. I'm happy to deliver, but somewhere it turned into an obligation, not unlike how the president is expected to be a sage, comforting leader. Every night I enter this hallowed building, I enter cognizant of the fact that a single gutterball could incinerate everyone's faith in me, could fracture the strange cornerstone my ego rests upon.

My lane is open, and I walk to it. I get some winks as I walk, some knowing smiles, some cautionary glances from the more skilled bowlers. When I step onto the hardwood, every worldly worry and desire clinging to my mind runs away and hides somewhere. I become totally unhinged, and feel nearly weightless as I put on my shoes. I remove the most sacred, polished sphere in Illinois from its dwelling, and insert my fingers delicately into its three orifices, an act poorly replicated by misguided missiles and their wives worldwide. Then I just breathe for a second. The bar and its sketchy inhabitants fade into oblivion, as does my great difficulty in reeling in woman, as does my dad and his frustratingly proper, precise bonsai shit. As these matters recede, thoughts of pins and balls and shiny hardwood bubbles up to the top of my mind. As always it happens, I feel tears quietly, stealthily running down my flushed cheeks. Overcome with joy to be this passionate, this HAPPY about something, I ritualistically wipe my face with my hands, then bring my hands to the bottom of my left shoe and wipe the tear matter on it. Extra traction. An emotional response, providing a tool for a physical, tactical advantage. As I snap my mind away from that overwhelmingly poetic concept, I rapidly advance towards the line, my arm rearing back like a toggle joint on an impossibly precise machine. The world slows to a haze around me; I can feel the eyes of everyone looking upon my form with awe, with hope. My heart beats quietly, confidently. I let the ball fly. POOUUUM.

POCKETY POCK POCK. The turkeys roll in.

Madness in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night"

Mikayla Marlow

Madness is a theme that is explored in various works of Shakespeare. In his comedy, Twelfth Night, Shakespeare examines madness through the character of Malvolio. During his perceived madness, Malvolio is locked up in a dark room. He is told that an exorcism will be performed to cure his possessed nature. Foolish behavior was often considered madness during these times. While Malvolio may have may have been tricked into his foolery due to his inability to read for context, during his evaluation scene, he becomes an excellent reader of the room. He correctly describes the house as dark. His use of the word here implies a direct connotation to the house of Olivia and the noble family living there. Malvolio's example is used to illustrate Feste's point early on in the play that it is in fact, Olivia and Sir Toby who are mad.

Malvolio is targeted due to his Puritanical values. He chastises Sir Toby and even Feste for their behavior. He says to Toby,

> My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?
> Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble
> like tinkers at this time at night? Do ye make an alehouse
> of my lady's house.
>
> (2.3.81-83)

Not only does Malvolio use the word "mad" here to describe Toby, but he also chastises his drunkenness—a quality his Puritan beliefs do not approve of. Toby and Feste respond with a cheerful song, ignoring Malvolio's complaints and mocking his perceived holiness. However, it is in the next lines that the plan to trick Malvolio out of revenge is devised.

In an earlier scene, Feste remarks at Olivia's foolishness for mourning her brother's death so. When Olivia asks for Malvolio's thoughts toward Feste, he responds, "I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a/barren rascal" (1.5.78-79). He does not think Feste is funny even for a fool, and it is possible that he disproves of Feste's behavior out of respect for Olivia's mournful state. Toby and Andrew were chastised for their rambunctious behavior. Perhaps here, Malvolio disagrees with the double-standards of the household. However, in response to Malvolio's viewpoint, Olivia tells him that he is "sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste/with a distempered appetite" (1.5.85-86). Feste's behavior is permitted because of his class standing. Malvolio is expected to behave more properly due to his working-class position, but he is not permitted to speak against the upper class as the fool is.

Zahid Shah argues that Malvolio's character is meant to highlight the narcissism in the rest of the cast as well as all of humanity. Olivia's remark about Malvolio's self-love ties perfectly well to not only Malvolio's personality, but that of the entire nobility. Shah writes:

> Shakespeare has been very careful in delineating the character of Malvolio. Derived from the Italian word, malvoglio, it means 'I dislike.' Malvolio, thus, seems to be a double entendre: Malvolio's scorn for others or others' scorn for him. Further, the prefix 'mal-' means 'bad, wrong, imperfect or defective,' hence, evil or sick.
>
> (130)

As mentioned before, Malvolio is thought to be a Puritan. Therefore, as Shah points out, it makes perfect since that his character would view others with scorn. He is not evil or sick—at least not in his own mind—but it is through his example that the nobility's madness can be seen.

During the scene of Malvolio's madness, Toby and Feste entrap Malvolio in a dark room where they pretend to have him evaluated for an exorcism. Feste, dressed as a priest, begins a mock exorcism and Malvolio cries out, "Sir Topas, never was a

man thus wronged. Good/Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here/in hideous darkness" (4.2.29-31). Darkness refers to the literal lack of lighting in the room here, but it also implies a moral darkness when combined with the word "hideous." Malvolio has read the scene properly this time, and will not be made victim of the foolishness around him. In his mind, Olivia is part of Toby's scheme. He also thinks he is speaking with a priest in this moment, and so it is arguable that he uses "dark" to imply a religious context. In the next lines, Feste even remarks, "I say there is no darkness but/ ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians/ in their fog" (4.2.43-45). He is speaking in riddles, but he follows the religious context that Malvolio has created.

These religious implications suggest that Malvolio is doing something more than just defending his sanity. His is openly attacking the house of Olivia and Toby and calling them mad by the definition of their foolish behavior. He is fighting against a double-standard that is held among different classes. Furthermore, Sean Benson argues that this scene is meant to illustrate Malvolio's ability to properly read a text or scene according to Puritanical standards. Benson argues that Malvolio did not misread the letter that led to his captivity either. The letter was meant for him as a joke played by Maria. Benson argues:

> Shakespeare uses Malvolio's reading as a way of touching on the Reformation dispute over hermeneutics ... yet at the same time he expands the notion of textuality to include the "text" of the body. Once Shakespeare establishes that people can also be "read" or interpreted, he suggests a striking parallel between Malvolio's reading of the letter and Sebastian's and Viola's "reading" of each other's identity in the play's recognition scene.
>
> (262)

According to this argument, Malvolio correctly interpreted the note due to careful and close reading skills. The same can be said about the room during his captivity. Not only did he

correctly deem the room as lacking light, but he analytically concluded that something "dark" was at play here in the hands of his foolish noble masters. He read the situation as he would a text, and though he is being defined as mad by his peers, careful readers can see that the madness lies in his fellow housemates.

In the end of the play, Malvolio vows revenge in a way much similar to Mercutio's death scene in Romeo and Juliet. Here, too, was a character commenting on the foolish behavior and double-standards held by the upper class. Though narcissistic in character, poor Malvolio is simply the vehicle in which directs readers to carefully read into the "darkness" of the upper class through the behaviors of Olivia and Toby. Perhaps it is the nobility who is mad and more so narcissistic at heart due to their treatment and double standards regarding the lower and working classes.

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Grandpa Shaves

Cameron Turnbull

Papa shaves his salt and
Pepper beard, cultivated
On the soil of his sagging skin.
The razor pulls and drags
The cream. The tender flesh exposed
Rebounds less and less each year.
His chest is chiseled by
Unbiased age. Tired and jaded,
It shows wear like a well-read
Paperback.
He laments his fading time,
Burdened by the grains
Of sand
At the bottom of his hourglass.
He glances in the mirror and wonders
If he'll ever shave again.

Time is a Janitor

Sydney Schwai

Time is a janitor who vacuums all

Existence but keeps the full bags of trash.

Miles of moments, of memories, fill hall

After hall of his stockpile, of his stash.

A maze of treasure and worn trash stolen

From cold rag-doll hands, from slit throats,

From lungs filled with water, from eyes swollen

Shut, from hollow coughs, from an overdose.

Yet he's the biggest bag of trash there is,

But there is not a janitor for him.

So he swallows life's crumbs and makes them his

And crams each bag of memories to the brim.

Forever Time will vacuum, horde, and care

For life's trash alone, with no one to share.

Any Part of Me

Gabrielle Girard

"I don't want anyone in or out of my family to see . . ."
~Evelyn McHale, suicide note

Strangers saw her dead with her chin tilted
And her lips apart and photographs here
In her handbag. Her body looked wilted
Crumpled skirt and shattered skeleton, smear
Of falling. Implied internal organs
Shifted when her spine collided with
A Cadillac. And it only begins,
Ash splattered magazine monolith.
She paid hard cold American cash
At the ticket counter to die this way
And people she grew up with saw her crash
Into pooling fluid steel, her stockings flay
Off of her shins like orange peels of nylon,
Like sheets on the bed in the hotel room
Where she asked for incineration on
Stationary paper. There was no tomb.

In the crawling elevator she thought
Of impact, a dropped bouquet, a bathtub
Of motor oil. Robert Wiles looked too: caught
"Bombshell Starlet Craters Into Warped
Limousine"—clicked his camera at a corpse.

Doe

Ben Ruiz

"Dammit! Not again!" Clint yelled as he pulled over to the side of the empty road. He stepped out of his car and walked to see where he had gotten hit. "I can't believe this is happening." Clint thought as he checked his Honda Accord he had been driving since high school for any damage. He thought he felt something hit him, it was too dark to tell, he figured it might have been some idiot who forgot to turn on their headlights when they got on the road.

He turned on his flashlight to check a little more thoroughly. Nothing. Clint guessed it was just his imagination...but he had this feeling as though he was hit. Immediately he thought of that part in *Lilo & Stitch* where Stitch gets caught underneath the car, but he quickly pushed away that thought as it would only work if HE was the one who hit something. He thought of what in the world could have made him stop so suddenly if nothing actually happened to the car. Then he heard rustling in the woods to his left and saw a doe dashing through the woods and jumping towards the street. He shined his flashlight at it, and it stared back as if it was in a trance.

It is beautiful, elegant, and strong, like his fiancé, Beth, sitting at home waiting for him to return. She's waiting for him to come back home, but even when he is home he isn't really there. He lays in bed, wondering what he can do to show Beth how he feels about her. He went along with everything she wanted even the idea of marriage. He knows he want it, but he can't seem to feel it.

In high school, Clint dazed through his classes focusing only on what he didn't already know. People tried to get close

because they thought they would get better grades if they sat next to the kid who could effortlessly get straight As. They didn't really want to know who he was, and he didn't really care to know about them. What's the point of talking to someone if they are just gonna step out of your life after graduation?

"Well because I won't." Beth would say. Beth was always honest about her feelings. She sat next to him in whatever classes they had together; she always stuck by his side even when they were kids. "Don't worry. I'll still be around for you."

But how could she be so sure. He wasn't even sure how he felt about her until she took him by the hand and made him dance during their prom. Sure he could participate in prom, but he didn't really care about going with anyone. It was then and there when she actually held him that he realized he could feel something; he could feel a warmth rising through his body, and he could feel his hands start to get sweaty.

"Why are you like this?"

Clint wouldn't answer.

"You know why I dragged you onto this dance floor?"

Clint stared into the pools of golden honey of her eyes and shook his head. Wanting to answer, but unsure of the response.

"Because, I think you need me."

"I don't think I need anyone. Why would I need you?"

"When we were kids we went to the same elementary school. You always seemed so alone, squatting in the playground looking at the ants take crumbs into their hills. Even now you still look just as alone, watching other high schoolers work, fall in love, and make friends. I just want to give you a friend. Someone or something to care about. I think I need that too." She said while looking at their feet move beneath them.

"Okay." He felt the pain in those last few words and decided to go along with what she said. Maybe she was right. Maybe this was what he needed.

Just like that doe, Beth charged forward. A mad dash for something greener on the other side and for some reason he couldn't help but love that. She was short, not very skinny, and had thin brown hair. She seemed so small that a single thing

that hit her would immediately break her, but in reality she was unbelievably strong and determined.

She always confided in him. Probably because he could keep his mouth shut. She handled a cheap living arrangement with her aunt and mourned her father. He wasn't dead. He just sucked. He didn't do anything for her. Maybe that's why she attached herself to Clint. Maybe she wanted to be there for someone because her father wasn't there for her. Like some sort of revenge against his abandonment.

The Doe jumped with such raw power, using her hind legs to propel herself into the air and towards the open road. Beth took all the strength she could muster and propelled Clint into some sort of relationship.

She first asked him what they were while sitting in the science classroom waiting for the teacher to show up.

"So...what should we call this?" She would ask leaning closer to Clint in her chair.

"I don't know. Whatever you want I guess." He answered.

"Do you not want me around." It wasn't a question. She knew that Clint didn't, but a part of him longed for her to stay.

"You can do whatever you want."

Whenever he said that she would puff her cheeks and stomp her foot and look at Clint with so much furry it was almost cute. The only truly annoying part about her was how childish she could be. Always wanting that reassurance and he never seemed to give her enough. Stomping her feet and looking him in the eye ready to pounce on him; just like that doe.

Clint would argue with himself as to why he couldn't knock some sense into himself. Why he couldn't give her the same love she gave him.

"She can feel so much, more than me, and I want to feel the way she does. I know what I have to do, but I feel like I'm being held back, like I'm holding my breath....waiting...as if she is going to leave. Dammit Clint what's wrong with you? She won't. She's worked so hard to love me." Clint said aloud as if it would help him make the change.

Then the sounds of tires screeching to halt, a crack, and a whimper. The scent of burnt rubber and fresh blood permeated the air.

The doe sprawled across the street its beauty scattered across the pavement staining the earth with its magnificence. Clint looked on in horror as this image of beauty was so quickly taken from him, unable to process the flurry of emotions that came as a result of the death of the doe.

The words barely escaping his breath, Clint whispered for Beth. He knew there was nothing he could do in this moment for the doe, but his heart yearned for it, hoping beyond reason that it was a quick death and that the doe would not suffer.

"Please. Please be dead. Please." Clint pleaded.

But the doe held on to life as if waiting for something more to happen as if it was waiting for Clint. Waiting for him to watch. The doe looked at Clint not with fear but with certainty.

"Do you know what is about to happen?" he asked reaching for the doe, then realizing that he was about to touch an animal that was dying and pulled back.

Clint felt sadness in the death that was to come, anger that it came too quickly, happy that he was able to experience its beauty, disgust in the carelessness in the driver, and fear that what he attached his heart to was dying alone.

"Beth." He whispered. "I need to get back to her."

Clint ran to his car and sped home. He knew what he needed to do.

Clint ran up to his door and burst in with such a furry Beth gasped and looked at Clint with concern.

"What's wrong?" she asked holding her hand to her chest, preparing herself for what was to come.

"I'm not good at telling you how much you mean to me. I'm sorry that it has taken me so long."

"I'm so confused. What is happening?"

"Beth. I watched a deer die today...and...I don't want to do that to you."

"What are you saying?"

"I care about you and can't be the person who breaks you."

He watched her stunned expression turn to concern. Her eyes filled with tears, and her arms crossed looking at Clint with the same pain he saw that night during prom.

"What are you going to do then?" She asked holding her breath.

"I am going to try."

Writer's Journey

Megan Rosenthal

"The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."
~Joseph Campbell

Some people count sheep to fall asleep. As a kid, I told myself stories until I drifted into dreams. Often, the stories in my head featured a heroine named Katrina. She was a lost princess captured by the enemy territory and living as a servant to the Dark Castle. Katrina was a warrior though, and the adventures she endured to escape and keep her own Kingdom safe were extravagant. I was always grateful to be taken along her journeys, but I didn't realize until years later that I was in control of her fate the way I had hoped to manage the chaos in my own ten-year-old self's life. My world had fractured when my mom was diagnosed with Leukemia, immediately followed by my father packing his things and walking out of our lives. Storytelling became a haven in my own head as fiction was easier than my reality. I continued to tell myself for years that if Katrina could take the pain of all she endured on her adventures, then I could survive, too.

~

It was a culture shock to enter middle school, mainly because they took away recess time. In elementary school recess, I would play a version of tag called "palm trees," but my favorite recess was when it rained, and all activities were moved inside. My classmates played boardgames and such, but in fifth grade, my indoor recesses were spent in a corner of the classroom with a five subject hard teal plastic notebook and one of my many decorative ballpoint pens. Each tab was dedicated to a different story idea that I would slowly build and flesh out between my

homework due dates. I rarely let anyone read them, especially after I made the mistake of letting my mom read one scene where my main character got bullied and she looked at me, asking, *"Is this really how you feel?"*

It wasn't until eighth grade that I admitted to my friends and teacher in my small English class that I liked writing stories. That was my favorite class. My teacher and I shared the same favorite color and mutual hatred for fluorescent light. The entire classroom was bathed in a soft pink glow from various lamps and she let us read teen dystopia books for one unit in our literature circle groups. When I told her after class that I had read the majority of the novels available, I was granted special permission to forgo the weekly reading responses and instead, I was encouraged to turn in a chapter every week of my current work in progress.

Her comment after the first week, *"I felt as though I were reading a real book,"* made me think to myself for the first time: I want to be a writer.

~

With the start of high school, the thought lied dormant and didn't surface again until sophomore year registration for classes when I saw the first creative writing class offered in my small school. It didn't fill, but the teacher that was down to lead the curriculum agreed to teach me and one other interest student in an independent study course.

The first unit of study was of the self: memoir. I hated it. I hated writing about my own life. I hated writing the truth of my troubles; I preferred to weave them into fiction and give them to a persona of a new name.

"*Write about your family,*" the first prompt suggested.

I hated every moment of it, but I wrote an essay about my dad. If at the least, I could call myself a tortured artist and fit the cliché mold.

I was encouraged to submit to an online magazine. The essay won Editor's Choice.

~

I didn't know what I wanted to study when I got accepted

into college.

I mean I did, but I knew the ridicule that would surely follow if I declared the program I was afraid of pursuing.

It was an online form, accepting my invitation to Queens University of Charlotte. The option to go head and declare my preferred major followed the acceptance, if I knew it already.

My mouse hovered over Business, clicking it once before unchecking the box. I scrolled through the alphabetical list to the bottom, clicking Undecided.

I scrolled back up to the top of the list, slower this time, reading all of the options. Drawing a quick breath, stopped at the E's. I waited a beat, then clicked English- Creative Writing and hit NEXT before I could talk myself out of it.

If I decided I didn't like it, or wasn't good enough, I could always change it later.

~

The year my sister read two hundred books, I was a sophomore in college and taking Seminar in Creative Writing with a focus on novel writing. The bulk of the class was situated around studying "The Hero's Journey," illustrated by Joseph Campbell.

As a class, we developed main characters and charted out each stage of the Hero's Journey to complete an outline for a novel. At the end of the semester, a sense of finality seeped through the words as I reread my synopsis for the way I envisioned our story would unfold. Here was a plan, an outline, an actual beginning, middle, and end for an entire book.

"*The hero's journey is present not only in books*," my professor had said. *"But in everyone's life. You may go on one, two, or hundreds of them in your lifetime, but there is a story alive inside all of you. The only question is,"* She placed my paper back on my desk, a large red-letter A visible through the back page. *"Are you brave enough to tease it out?"*

I was terrified, but I felt for the first time in that moment that a writer was no longer just a gossamer dream of mine, shimmering out of my grasp. It had shifted into something concrete, something real. Something I could actually become.

Protanopia: Color Vision Deficiency

Gabrielle Girard

Ever since he crawled out of the airbag
placenta on the side of the highway,
his head has been a broken TV, gag
gift of existence—when he bleeds, it's gray.
They said another bump might jog things back,
but he's been dumped off of window sills and
bridges, tackled in helmets, beaten slack:
he's lost teeth, but sorbet still looks like sand.
He used to have tie dye in his eyes, see
green, and know how it feels, and what it means.
Now he wades in swamp shades. He orders tea,
says, "This is real," and locks his knees in jeans
he changed twice for a coffee date with a
corpse. She breathes fine and smiles, but her lips are
blue, and it hits him much harder today,
when people look drowned. She has these wet tar
pupils and yellow eyes, and he's been stuck
kissing monsters, nothing better to do.
Things could be a lot worse but sunsets suck.
He doesn't mean to pick fights, but there's new
rainbow span crayons in his jacket pocket,
Flipping channels behind his eye socket.

Watercolor

Izzy Harvey

The way you beat up women
Makes it seem like you think it's an
Art Form
Like the bruising of their bodies is a silk
Watercolor mosaic
And the red glitter in their teeth is just another
Constellation

The way you manipulate their ears into
Only hearing your wavelength
Is like the way my radio has been
jammed on static
You've ruined something I could've liked
simply because you're in it

So look at me, bathed in disco light
As I turn my head
And you see the black paint under my skin
Will you hear me say,
"Am I pretty now?"

"*Watercolor*"

Deficit

Gabrielle Girard

She was rabid at two a.m. Peanut butter
By itself was a weekly ritual of unquantifiable failure.
Ninth grade tasted like lemon in water.
(Five). Not too much. Clementine segment lies,
(Thirty-five). Celery sticks, (ten).
When she was fifteen, she read energy
Bar wrappers instead of books. She counted
Strawberries, (thirty for three). Her coffee tasted
Like tar, (five). She ordered ice water at restaurants, (zero).
Tenth grade was Algebra and she couldn't
Think about the numbers because the inside of
Her head looked like the stock exchange.
She watched them absorb three-digit
Cupcakes, licked sugar stiff icing poison
Off of fingers in fifties at her birthday party.
She could not look away. She ate her nails instead
Of lunch, had nightmares about
Bagels, regurgitated grandmother's mandatory
Cheesecake in upstairs bathrooms, like an arctic
Penguin, and Googled cough drop calories.
Eating was a calculation of numbers, deadly digits,
Scrambling to defuse the bomb, revisiting
The food tumor seven times to determine
The diagnosis: fatal. Even now,
Sometimes she blinks and sees the matrix in
Gas station convenience stores. Sometimes she still
Tastes threats and sixties in applesauce.

Sunshine

Elisabeth King

The smeared ebony ink was still prominent on my hand. I guess that was karma for writing out the Thursday payroll check list with a gel pen. The ink refused to disappear, the streak only fading slightly as I licked my thumb and rubbed over the stained area of my hand. Several workers passed by my desk and bid me good morning as they carried on with their routines.

"A makeup remover wipe will take that right off, Penny." There was only one husky voice in that office that had the ability to make my heartbeat accelerate. He flopped himself down in the conference chair across from my desk and chuckled to himself.

"I don't think I should ask how you know that," I replied without a single glance in his direction.

I had known Jack Martin since my father hired him two years ago. His six-foot-four height towered over my small frame, accented with his dirty-blonde hair, and I secretly believed that he enjoyed distracting me with his emerald eyes. Our family business needed guys like Jack. Our 1980s styled facility needed young, good-looking faces to help distract others from the yellow floral wallpaper in the office area. He was one of the route boys, delivering freshly laundered and pressed uniforms and business mats to whatever company required them that day. My dad was not taken by Jack's charm as I was. Jack had a nasty habit of locking the keys to the work van *inside* the van all too often. The ladies in the office would place their bets on what day of the week he would get fussed at for the incident. I joined in on their gambling every once in a while.

"Your dad wants to see you, Sunshine," he said as he slumped down in the chair and tapped his boots on the floor tile.

"I never thought that nickname would stick," I said as I paper clipped a few checks together.

"It's not my fault that you got confused when I was on the phone. Serves your great-grandfather right for naming the company Sunshine Uniform."

"I wasn't confused. I was just misled. You were *staring* right at me when you said it. How was I supposed to see your phone under all of that shaggy hair?" I argued.

The truth of the matter was that I had been very confused. I must have been blinded by his stupidly handsome face that day. The name stuck ever since.

"Thanks for telling me about my Dad, by the way. He probably wants to ask my opinion on the best way to fire you," I teased. Jack stood up in the chair and leaned over my desk, placing his hands flat on the papers that were scattered across the surface.

"You know better than to tease me, Sunshine. I'll have them put extra sour cream on your tacos for lunch today."

"You wouldn't dare! You know how I feel about that nasty white crap!"

"Try me," he said. With one steady stroke of his hand he flipped his hair back and sauntered into the plant to get back to work. I found myself leaning forward to catch a glimpse of him walking away.

He was known as a notorious player. The ladies in the office would gossip how no pair of long legs and sparkling eyes had walked through that door that he had not already flirted with. His last authentic relationship went on for a year. He thought he was in love with the girl, but she left him for a military man who had offered to marry her immediately. Ever since then it was as if he had closed his heart to any opportunity of another relationship. I tried convincing myself that I was different from the girls he flirted with, that he secretly wanted me as much as I wanted him, but my Dad wanted me to "keep my head on straight." I deserved more than a route guy with an uncertain future, is what he would usually advise me when he caught me stealing glances or small stares at Jack.

"I see he relayed my message to you, but you chose to ignore it," my Dad said as he approached my desk from my left side.

"I didn't ignore it. I just got momentarily distracted," I insisted

as I pulled my gaze away from Jack's direction.

"Of course. Although, you do have a little drool on the side of your lip there. You might wanna wipe that off, Pen. Hand me the payroll checks, and I'll sign them." I rolled my eyes.

"You don't have to say anything. I can find someone better. I deserve the world. Jack is not what I need, blah blah blah."

"Honey, I'm just looking out for your best interests. You've seen guys like Jack come in and out of here all the time. He's just biding his time until a better job comes along. I just don't want him biding his time with *you* until another girl comes along. Keep your head on straight, Penny."

When the lunch hour chimed I waited for Jack in the conference room like usual. It was the only quiet area where we could enjoy our food in peace. Plus, it gave me a promising excuse to be alone with him. Five minutes turned into fifteen minutes, and he had still not appeared with the tacos. I walked out into the office area to look for him.

"Has anyone seen Jack walk through here?" I asked the ladies.

"I thought I heard his voice near your Dad's office," one of them answered.

I strutted down the hallway only to find him, take out bags in hand, buttering up the daughter of the blonde woman who sold us industrial soap. I should have walked away, but instead, there I was, leaning up against the wall analyzing his features, wishing that he would take one second to glance in my direction and remember that we had a lunch date. She popped out her knee and tilted her head to one side as he gave way for his charming side to emerge. She adjusted her shirt, and I reached down to repeat the same motion for my own.

For years I was reminded by my school peers that I was not as pretty as the other girls. My brownish-copper hair would never be as silky and shiny; my mocha brown eyes would never be as captivating. I thought the whispers and comments would die down by the time high school started, but when I was rejected by three guys for prom, I instantly knew why. Those memories continued to haunt me at my lowest points. I was plain, ordinary, and for one minute, I wanted to believe that a handsome guy like

Jack could truly want me. Maybe I had idealized this situation too much. No, I know I had. There he was flirting with another girl who was possibly ten times prettier than me. I was mad at myself for thinking this could be anything more than a friendship.

"Your tacos are getting cold, Penny," Kelly, the accountant, whispered from behind me.

I straightened my posture and smoothed out the frizz in my hair before making my presence known in the hallway. Their conversation ceased as I approached. Jack turned his gaze to me, as if I were some sort of ghost that had appeared from the shadows. In one swift motion I snatched the bag from his hands and made my way to the conference room. A minute later I heard his boots clomping through the office on a mission to confront me.

"What was with that attitude? I was on my way!" Jack protested.

"On your way? Oh yeah sure tell that to the soap girl you were.... scrubbing up a few minutes ago while you were holding *my* tacos! I needed my tacos!" I said as I flailed my hands in the air. My temper was boiling, but I decided to gently sit down in the chair and eat my tacos while I still had part of my lunch time left.

"No, no. Stop," My five-foot-three height was now consumed by his shadow, "This is not about the tacos. You don't even like tacos *that* much! Do I sense a little bit of *jealousy*, Sunshine?"

"I wouldn't flatter yourself that much, Jack. I just wanted the tacos."

"Well you've got your shitty tacos now, so why aren't you in a better mood?"

"Because...because they put sour cream on these things! That's why! You weren't paying attention when you got them and now they're ruined. You never pay attention! You never notice the things happening right in front of you! You choose to ignore them, and now there is sour cream everywhere!" I snapped. He fell silent, dumbfounded at my sudden outburst, but then he spoke softly.

"Well then, if that's how you truly feel, I guess I should let you eat your ruined tacos in peace."

He turned his back to me and shook his head as he walked out. I could hear the office go silent as he passed through.

"Keep your head on straight, Penny," I whispered my Dad's words.

I knew Jack's work schedule like I knew how to balance a check book, expertly. I remained in my little cubicle for the entirety of the work day, the floral pattern on the wallpaper suddenly becoming much more vibrant in my eyes.

"Pen, if you wanna go on home, I'll finish the rest of your balancing," Kelly's thick New Jersey accent reverberated in my ears.

The whole office knew of mine and Jack's squabble earlier, so with a warming smile and a gentle hand on my shoulder, Kelly sent me home.

My apartment felt cold and much too quiet when I came through the front door. It was Tuesday, my long standing movie night with Jack. A part of me wanted to believe that he would still want to come tonight, so I left the door unlocked, just in case. My mind began to wander to the events of the day. How could I let myself be distracted by his good-looks, or his flirtations that were obviously not meant to be taken seriously? My Dad was right; he had managed to fool my heart, and I needed to move on. The only thing left for me to do was put on my Christmas cow sweatshirt and curl up by the fire to watch Hallmark Christmas movies until I fell asleep, and that's exactly what I did.

"Just go ahead and get out of the car! He's not going to be the one you want by the time this is all over!" I shouted at my TV.

"Who is it that you want, Sunshine?" The voice startled me, causing me to chuck a couch pillow towards the direction of the intruder. Jack caught the pillow with his empty left hand.

"Oh my god you scared me!" I said as I stood up and covered myself in one of my plush blankets. He walked closer to me and held out a brown paper bag. I didn't remove my hands from the corners of the blanket consuming me.

"Please just take it and open it." I hesitantly took the bag from his hands, being hyper-aware of the crinkling sound it made as it came into my hands. I walked over to the coffee table and

inspected the contents.

"Cookies...shaped and frosted to look like tacos...where on earth did you even find these?" I asked.

"Tonight was Mexican food night for my Mom's book club. Mrs. Watson thought maybe you would come tonight, so she brought over a tray of these cookies from Barry's Bakery. I thought I would steal a few and bring them over to apologize for earlier," he chuckled. I nodded my head, curling my lips to keep myself from outwardly smiling. I would not give in to his gesture. I was hurt, and I wanted him to figure out why. I would not fall at his feet in forgiveness and hand myself to him on a silver platter. I sat down on the couch and pressed play on my movie, seemingly unbothered by his presence in my living room.

"And exactly why am I here to apologize you may ask?" he said trying to get my attention. He stood in front of the TV, but still no words came out of my mouth. "Silent treatment, of course. You're pushing me away."

"It's not a silent treatment. I just have nothing else to say. I appreciate the cookies, but you also interrupted my movie." I replied, not breaking my eye contact with the screen. He took off his shoes and tossed them by my kitchen table before sitting down on the opposite side of the couch. "What are you doing?"

"I'll sit here until you finish your movie, then we'll talk," he said.

For the next hour and a half he remained quiet. He did not use his phone, speak, or move closer to me. He sat in his spot, the cushion indention still visible from our former movie nights. He watched the movie, suffering through cheesy pick-up lines and predictable hallmark endings. When the credits scrolled across the screen, I muted the TV and put the remote down on the coffee table. He shifted in his seat, tucking one leg under the other and turning to face me, his left arm propping his head on the back of the couch cushion.

"Are you listening, Sunshine?"

"I'm listening," I replied.

"I'm sorry that I walked out on our conversation earlier, but I can't try to fix the situation if you don't tell me what is bothering

you. Now, are you going to tell me what it is, or do I have to pry it out of you?"

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Jack. I was just mad about the tacos."

"Oh come on, Pen. I'm not playing this game; just tell me what's wrong," he insisted.

"What's wrong? You really want to know what's wrong. Fine! You don't want me."

"I what?"

"Your flirting, the nickname, our conversations, everything is a ruse to you isn't it? None of it means anything. I bet you have hundreds of girls you play this game with. I'm almost ashamed of myself for even liking you in the first place!" I broke. Everything I had wanted to say for the past two years had come flooding out of my mouth and into the space that separated us.

"Do you really think I spend all my free time tracking down other girls to flirt with?"

"Everyone in the office says that you love to flirt with any attractive girl that crosses your path," I argued.

"You've physically seen me flirt with how many girls over the past two years? Hmm? Think about that for one second. Tell me how many you have seen me flirt with...." The room might as well have been filled with crickets.

"Well, there was the one today...and that girl at Starbucks one time," I trailed off.

"You're forgetting that I flirted with the girl at Starbucks to get you a free croissant. As for today, you caught one end of my conversation with a girl you were intimidated by. You automatically assumed that I was flirting with her because her appearance made you feel inferior. The rest of it is just rumor and talk that you have let cloud your judgement! I pay attention to everything, Penny. I know when your moods change. I know when you've had a frustrating day at work and the muscles on your forehead crinkle. I know when your Mom passed away that you would cry in your little cubicle if the slightest thing reminded you of her. I know how much you hate sour cream."

I hadn't realized how much Jack took notice of my life. Maybe

I was the one who had not been paying attention to *him*. It was as if a spark ignited in my mind. The only times I would allow myself to hang out with Jack had been our movie nights. Otherwise, I kept myself distant, thinking that any other form of relationship would be out of the question and that it would be pointless to get too attached. I never wanted to go out anywhere public for lunch, even when he had asked, as to avoid awkward car rides. I said no to multiple dinners after work and several outings with his friends. I had been pushing him away for fear that I would get hurt and assuming things of him in the process.

"Then how do you explain the sour cream on my tacos for lunch...." I muttered.

"In your little fit of rage you ate mine instead, you nugget," he replied. He got off the couch and bent down on his knees in front of where I was sitting, grabbing my hands and caressing the top of them with his thumbs. "I know the confidence you have in yourself is low, but why is it so hard for you to believe that someone may actually care about you? Stop pushing me away." The reflection of snowflakes on the TV screen lit up the dark room. Things were much clearer now.

"Pass me a cookie."

Young Shame

Leslie Castillo

I was sitting down, in what was the basement of my combination middle/elementary school and I was still in my drab of a uniform. The starch white, already wrinkled from the day, button down shirt, haphazardly tucked into my forest green plaid skirt that had yellow and red lines running across it. My black knee high socks already slipping down my legs and into the worn out black flats that have survived hell and back for me. I sat with this girl with creamy dark brown skin and matching dark eyes encased in glasses. Her name was Johana; she was a friend, she was also into the same exact things that I was into at that time. She was the ideal person, smart, cute, funny, similar interests, my literal best friend.

Little reminder, that this was my "Disney Channel" phase with all their current roster of new talent. I was in denial about the whole thing, despite being tentatively out as "bi-curious" to my close enough friends at the moment. As I sat with her for some event that was taking place, I worked up the courage to say that I liked her more than a friend. As I so eloquently put it, "I'm having dreams about you..." no, not dreams where we can't keep our hands off each other, those syrupy sweet kind of romance ones.

But how does one misinterpret that? Well, I see how you would, the delivery wasn't exactly romantic. Followed by, "I think I like-like you" which went right into "the least romantic" confessions department. Incoming, her rejection that felt like the end of the world. I had to move on as quickly as I thought that I liked her...I hated that school anyway. I found myself desperate to leave that school that was nothing but an emotional death trap.

I had plans to leave the Bronx to a whole to another state for

high school but the deadline to apply was in August. By eighth grade, I had already succumbed to "high school searching," where I picked three catholic schools, and took the mandated TACHS exam (Test for Admission into Catholic High Schools). Top three were: Academy of Mount Saint Ursula, Aquinas High School, and Preston High School, all within the South Bronx. I picked all girls high schools because I wanted to focus on my studies. I pretended that boys at our age were the real distraction. I checked out all three of them.

By the time I got to Ursula, I was blown away, by its large campus, and by its beauty. The large rolling fields, green grass and trees everywhere. Two large buildings, one the convent, the other, where the actual classes were held along with all its various events and activities took place. The Academy, or Amsu, or Ursula's main building, was beige colored bricks predominantly, with faded moulding around its windows that had broken or dented screens. Its main was door white with a gray archway that had much larger slabs of what I think we're stones.

The feeling gathered in my chest, pulling the air out of my lungs, and I couldn't sigh it out. It glowed, it burned. This was it, this was the home that I have been looking for. I stumbled onto it, in a place where I didn't think I was gonna find it. Funny enough, Preston and Aquinas did not accept me, they most likely didn't like my score on the TACHS.

The Academy, however, did. They picked me to represent them, which was the beginning of my strenuous self-rediscovery. However, that was put on hold, when I saw such a pretty girl run past me while I was also rushing to homeroom. We both were late to freshman orientation that September. She was a brunette, with her large backpack that had her name: Emely. Goodness, she was a stunner, with her dark eyes, bright smile and endless talent. She was about my height, so she was about 5'3, and had glasses, but she didn't always wear them. I finally caught up with her a second later at the vice principal's office, she left before I did.

As I speed walk to my home room, I see her there. Of course she'd be in my home room. I, of course, like the not all suave

woman that I am, mumble to her to move a seat back because she was sitting in mine. It wasn't really mine but they always order you by the alphabet. So she sat behind me, for only a week or so, until the home room teacher moved her to the next row. She started the M row, her last name was Martinez. Another instance with a crush that rejected me after I asked her out on a "crummy date". The brilliant colors of the sun were setting low behind the trees, we definitely had jackets on, so it was hard to tell.

We were walking back to campus after completing required service hours that late afternoon in freshman year. I still to this day can't tell if I asked her out during winter or spring. But, as we were walking back, I swallowed my nerves to ask her out on date. She told me it was nothing personal, she would've, if she swung my way. She also told me a personal story of hers from middle school to back up her why she wouldn't go on out a date with me. During that time, she was after a guy nicknamed, "Rusty" from the local all-boys school, called Fordham prep.

I didn't have to come out to anyone here. Everyone either didn't talk to me or didn't care enough, too busy with their lives to know about mine, which was fine. As the drama unfolded between my rather large groups of friends that I wasn't prepared for, I came out to my brother's girlfriend first. This time, I was out to myself, proud even to be part of two marginalized groups, being latina, and bisexual. I told her over text, it was easier for me to work up the courage to do so for my first time.

In late November of Senior year, I sat on the steps leading to my room and his in our house, listening to Sara Bareilles's "Brave", working up the strength to tell my brother. My ride or die, my friend, that I wasn't straight. I got up, finally, after a few runs of the song. I knock on his door, where he was with his girlfriend. I was struck heavy with the fear that he will reject me, that he will hate me, that he will tell my mom, that he would have an adverse reaction. I tried to calm down my heart that is beating out of my chest. What I didn't anticipate was for him to shrug and tell me that it was okay. That I clearly march to own beat of my drum. He smiled as I trembled with happiness. I was ready to

burst into tears. He reassured me and told me not to cry. All this positivity wasn't bad. I also didn't plan on coming out to other people in my family during this year. I came out to my cousin, Josie, which wasn't that scary. I grew up with her, and so telling her, wasn't too heavy. Telling my other cousin, who feels like an aunt more than anything, was. She helped raised me and so I told her one night at dinner while she was visiting during the winter. I typed in my phone notes, and I let her read it. She told me she still loved me. I came out to four people...none of them included my parents.

Oh God, how terrifying that was. The mere thought itself had me shaken to my core with the same fear I went in with my brother, but now it would be ten times worse. These were my parents, my more americanized mother and machista father. The very people who never really, had anything positive or negative say about the lgbt community. Well, except my father who likes making crude gay jokes because he thinks he's funny.

The heaviest of shame, the heaviest of guilt pushed into me when I finished school one day, and I was emotionally unsettled. I felt the panic rise in my veins, my mind in overdrive. I tried not to outwardly project my emotions but I had never been too good at hiding what I was feeling. Especially not to my mom.

I don't think that I planned telling my mother that day but I didn't wanna keep this from her anymore, and risk wanting to put it off for the rest of my life. She has a right to know, after all she is the very foundation of my life.

The memory is hazy at best, my brother that day was in Queens--at Laguardia Community College taking a final, she dropped him off, then she drove me around. There was faint music, might have been the English station. It was 3 pm, with the sun setting in spring, Alex sensation wasn't dj'ing anymore. I almost broke down before I got the words out, but I yanked them out of me and then flooded the sleeve of my senior sweater with snot and tears. She told me that she loved me anyway.

After graduation, Community College was just an extension of me, as much as I carried that badge of shame with me, a huge part of me was relieved that I didn't have to face so much grief.

I had transitional friends here, I had one solid friend for those two years and he decided that he wanted to mess up by both propositioning me to sleep with him and asking me out on date right before I'm set to leave New York. Who does that? Really? Who waits that long to do something. Apparently he does. I have not spoken to him since August. Besides him there was this other guy--the coolest I have met since he's a superhero nerd like me and a writer. I'm pretty sure he's still in the community college that I left behind.

I come down here finally, to the school of my dreams. I'm far more worried about getting shamed for being out, especially in a conservative bible belt state. Scared that I will be mocked, or physically hurt or reduced to just my sexuality, being seen differently or so many other worse things. I am still worried that my roommate thinks less of me because I came back from pride with my colors and I simply told her that I was just going uptown. I came out to my friends here, quickly, so they know. That isn't okay to be myself fully, here, I know it's a safe place but sometimes our judgements and preconceived notions seep through show our actions and words. But if those broken sidewalks, shattered streets and grimy train handrails taught me anything from the last decade I was living there was to: "Woman the hell up" and "Resist, Resist, Resist."

Plein Air

Gabrielle Girard

I did not surface in your empty
Swimming pools, choking on flower petals,
In lemonade sunlight. In my time
I was too real, and hardly accurate.
They said I lacked ability, and still,
My wife was smeared blue in the rapids
Of her deathbed. Buttery fingerprint
Lily pads drifted in the
Cataract-blurred pastel depths of
My consciousness. In Le Havre
I left you with the impression of
A mashed French macaron sunrise,
And now I am immortal in your textbooks
My haystack realities sealed in your bulletproof
Glass-case museums. I am raised up,
I am reduced to prints hung on the beige
Walls of your institutions.
My oily, pigmented light,
Clashing with your kitchen wallpaper.
Hazy on the history channel, I'm still here:
A modern-day interpretation
Of Claude Monet.

Medusa

Ally Bush

Medusa stands with
Perseus' head.
So comfortable with death,
she wears it like
A crown. But that is
just a myth, the dead
Inevitably tend
to think alike.

She holds his bleeding
head like a handbag.
She holds her bleeding
sword like a sword.

He didn't think her
virtue had a price tag.
Snakes rearing, fingers
steady, she explored

His throat with a blade.
He should have been more
Careful where he went
without his armor.

It started, stopped so soon,
but it was war.
She hadn't always
been a snake charmer.

His head in her concrete hand,
he cowers.
Her toes on a pedestal,
she towers.

Bloodlust

Abby Hicks

"The real world will knock you on your ass." God
damn I hope so. I hope I hit the ground
so hard it changes the shape of my ass.
I hope it hurts. I hope I see sparks spin
into a fire I can't control, and my
eyes sting. I will have none of this "staying
afloat" business. I want to drown. Leave me
gasping, until my raw throat crackles with
every breath, Life! Do not love me gently.
I will say, "I've never done this before."
You will say, "No one has." So don't hold back.
When I slip you the tongue, tear it out of
my face with your teeth. Grip me too tightly.
Do too much too violently. Leave me
scratches and burns and bruises and broken
everything. I am not untouchable:
Make my corpse unrecognizable. I
am not here to come out the other side.
I'm here to make this so-called "real world" mine.

Hot Chocolate

Abby Hicks

I drive my gloved fist into the punching bag, feeling the joints in my arm tremble as sweat drips off of my nose and pastes my shirt to my back. I don't usually work out this late on Saturday, but Allie's not here tonight. So I don't care if I stink; I don't care that my knuckles are bruising, and I don't care that Eddie Hughes is a nice guy: This bag is still his stupid nice-guy face, because I can't stop picturing it pressed up against Allie's. I can't stop picturing them in the back row of a movie theater holding buttery hands in the dark. That's the part where I come in and beat the shit out of him, and then I turn to Allie and I-

No. Now I start pounding the bag like it's my own thick skull.

Allie does not have beautiful chocolate eyes. Allie does not have beautiful caramel skin. Allie does not have beautiful pouty lips. Allie is not beautiful. Allie is my friend. I'm just feeling a little possessive because she's my only friend. That's all.

The muscles in my arms start stinging enough to bring them down. I gulp down some air and glance out of the glass wall separating the gym from the rest of the house. My sister Megan is standing there in the hallway, frowning at me. The second I see her, she walks away. She's been doing strange stuff like that a lot lately; shutting herself in her room, not talking much, getting most of her hair cut off.

I take a towel and dry myself off a little bit before putting it around my neck and squirting water into my mouth. I should go check on her.

I climb the black iron spiral staircase into the den. The mahogany furniture is impossible to move and the hardwood floor is a recipe for disaster, but that's never stopped the three of us from sliding around hitting styrofoam balls with plastic bats.

There have been bruises and broken lamps, but thankfully the raindrop chandelier is a good ten feet over everyone's heads, and mom is usually fucked off to her office upstairs.

I see the silly chalkboard sign on my sister's door at the end of the hallway; it's got her name written on it in her pretty handwriting. She even has one at dad's house too. I tease her about it all the time, "*You need a sign to find your own bedroom?*" To be fair, our parents' houses are ridiculous. I walk past the library and the third guest bedroom before arriving at Megan's room. I'm about to knock when I hear her crying.

She stopped crying when she realized our parents would only listen long enough to reload ammo to shoot at each other, so it's a sound I haven't heard in a few years. It used to be a constant, like the air conditioning, or the phone ringing. She was even crying when we met Allie.

We were all in fifth grade, because I skipped fourth. I really wanted to skip a grade so I could be in the same classes as Megan, but I think it cemented my "superior sibling" status. Megan wasn't upset about that at this particular moment, though. She was upset about mom and dad. Again.

Allie walked over to us and pointed at her, "Hey, rich kid. What's wrong with you?"

"Shut up Allie," came the automatic response from Wyatt, our class's loudest asshole.

Allie was (and is) somewhat of a loud-mouth herself, so the other kids had taken to shushing her as a running "joke."

She turned to Wyatt, flipping her ridiculously long, dirty-blonde, almost-brown hair that she adamantly refused to put up. I had seen her many times trying to brush out the tangles with her fingers and almost crying.

"Make me," she snapped.

"Ooooo," the onlookers went, but they lost interest when Allie simply looked back at us, face flushed in frustration at her own unfortunate choice of phrasing.

"I said, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing," Megan sniffled to the floor.

Allie addressed me then, "What's wrong with her?"

I could tell she wasn't going to leave us alone, so I answered, "Our parents had a fight."

Allie sat down in front of us, crisscross-applesauce, "Your parents? Why?"

I scrunched up my face, trying to come up with an answer.

Megan had come into my room in the middle of the night, scared because she heard the garage door open. I told her I would go check it out, and she came with me, not wanting to be left alone. We reached the top of the stairs, but the sound of our parent's voices stopped us in our tracks.

"Where the hell have you been?" Dad demanded.

"What, did I come back too soon?" Mom asked, not even looking at dad as she walked past him to the fridge to get some water. "Is she still here?"

"What? Who?" Dad followed her.

"Whoever it is you're fucking, because it sure isn't me," she took a pointed drink from her glass.

"Oh and when exactly am I supposed to fuck you? You're never home."

"My career is important to me Jerry-"

"So is mine-"

I sneezed, and they both looked up at us. Mom covered her entire face with her hands.

Dad pointed at us and said, "Do you want to explain this to them?"

Mom flung down her hands and spat, "Do you really still want to do this right now?"

They didn't explain it to us. They told us it was nothing, to forget about it and go back to bed.

"I guess because mom stayed out late last night, and dad was worried about her," I told Allie.

"Oh, that makes sense," Allie nodded.

She appeared to be deep in thought for a moment. Then she got up and poked Megan in the shoulder.

"Tag, you're it."

Megan finally looked up at her, and Allie smiled brightly. Allie poked her again.

"Now you're it twice."

"That's not in the rules," Megan mumbled.

"If you know so much about tag," Allie started to back away, "Then come tag me."

Megan was smiling again by the time school started.

I wish I could get her to smile now, but she sounds so upset that I bet only Allie could do that. Only Allie... Oh.

Oh.

Suddenly it all makes sense.

How weird Megan has been acting. How she's never shown any romantic interest in anyone. How she hates scary movies, but always wants to watch them with Allie. I thought she was just being nice, because Allie loves them, but I bet that's an excuse to hold her hand. I also thought she just didn't know how to take a compliment, but suddenly her blushing and spluttering seems suspect. The long glances, too. I thought she was just spacey, but now... Do we both stare at Allie thinking of the same things?

I start walking away from Megan's door, not sure where I'm going or why.

When she brushes Allie's still always tangled hair, and Allie breathes a contented "Hmm," have we both been feeling the same *thing*? Ew. EW

I bet that's why Megan always has Allie stay in a guest bedroom instead of sharing her bed. Would I be that considerate, given the opportunity? Shut up of course I would, I'm not a fucking creep. Aren't I though? Aren't we both? How long has our entire friendship with Allie been a lie? At least since the beginning of freshman year. That's when I realized.

Mom and dad have always had someone drive us to school. They want us to have the "public school experience" like they did, but apparently the bus is taking it too far. Megan and I spent the ride in the usual new car smell and silence, resigning ourselves to spend the next year with the same kids from middle school who reduced us from people to a single quality. Not even a quality about us, but a quality about our parents. We were foggy with glumness until we stepped out into the bright morning sun where Allie was waiting for us. She walked all the way from the bus drop off to the car drop off just to walk with us to the front doors instead of meeting us there. She still does that.

"Why're you wearing jeans?" I asked, since it was about 80 degrees outside.

"Good question, so glad you asked," Allie began habitually, "You know how I grew a lot over the past year?"

Megan and I both nodded, acknowledging her five feet and eight inches. I was still a little bit taller than her, and Megan came in at five four. We were making our way up the sidewalk slowly, surrounded by the sound of car doors closing, signaling the ejection of other children.

"Yeah, it's just what I need, another thing to draw attention to myself," Allie grumbled before continuing, "Anyway, all of my shorts are too short for school now, hence the jeanage. There's a pile of them waiting for me when I get back home today," she sighed, "At least Major will probably enjoy them while they're out."

Major is Allie's terrier; he likes to suckle on fabric, usually blankets but clothes too, because he was separated from his mom too early as a puppy. Another of his cute little quirks is pissing in the floor when he's pissed. You'd think Allie's parents would get onto her for that. Mine would, and they have enough money to replace the floors in their houses every day for the rest of their lives if they feel like it. But Allie's parents just know she'll take care of it, and she does. At the same time, my parents tell me and Meagan we're not responsible enough for a dog, while we're both pruning from wading through our own urine

our whole lives.

"And there is one thing these legs are good for," Allie said, starting to lunge and stretch forward instead of walking like a normal person.

"What?" Megan asked, smiling and shaking her head.

"Running," Allie grinned, "Let's race."

"Aw c'mon," Megan protested.

"I don't know..." I said.

"It'll be like the last race of our childhood, signaling our growth into teenagers and the start of our new lives as high schoolers, or some bullshit like that. Please," Allie begged.

Megan and I exchanged a glance.

"Fine," she sighed, and I shrugged. With that, Allie was off.

"Hey!" I called, sprinting after her.

The judgmental faces of our peers blended together, and all I felt was my feet pounding the cement, my lungs bursting, my backpack thudding against my back like my heart in my chest, and the humid air parting around my face. I passed Allie fairly quickly, and we both left Megan trailing somewhere behind. At some point I stopped hearing Allie's footsteps too, so I turned around and saw her with her backpack in her hands, crouching to let Megan climb on and piggy-back. *Not kids anymore, huh?* I thought.

"Hang on!" Allie yelled before breaking into a run again.

Megan is a stick figure, and Allie is more heavyset and all muscle, so my pause to look gave them enough time to catch up to me. I had just gotten back to top speed, with them on my tail, when a teacher told us to cool it.

"Sorry sir," Allie managed before losing her voice in a fit of huffing.

We formed a hands-on-knees circle just in front of the doors, all of us fighting for breath too hard to move.

"What... is it... with you... and running..." Megan gasped.

Allie took a second to answer; whether she was thinking or struggling for air, I don't know, but eventually she said,

"It makes me feel alive."

And that's when I knew.

Did Megan love her before then? Did I? When did this happen? Was it that very first moment in the gym? Was it the first time Allie came over, and convinced us to camp out in our backyard? Was it after Allie's team won the softball championship in seventh grade, and we were the first people she ran to?

I'm pulled out of my thoughts by my arrival in the kitchen. My feet have brought me here out of habit; whenever Megan was upset, I used to always bring her a cup of hot chocolate. I don't even know if we have any now. I start poking around in cabinets and drawers until I find that we don't have any in packets, but we do have those little cup things, so I put one in the Keurig and listen to it splutter out into a blue mug. Its warmth calms me, and I'm fully conscious of every step I take back to Megan's room. I knock. I hear some intensified sniffs and some rustling, and then she calls, "Come in."

Her room is so weirdly clean; I don't know how she does it. And it's all white and pink and lacy: You'd think she was twelve, not sixteen.

"Oh, thanks, David," she says when I put the hot chocolate on her nightstand next to her, and sit in her desk chair. She picks up the mug, but doesn't drink it. She just holds it, and waits for me to say something. I open and close my mouth a few times, but nothing comes out.

"What?" She asks bitingly, and then sighs, "Sorry. I'm just-" she shakes her head.

"What's wrong?" I ask, just to have something to say.

"Nothing," she says firmly.

I don't know if that makes me angry or relieved, but either way, I'm not leaving it there. I take a deep breath and close my eyes, "It's about Allie, isn't it?"

I feel my heart beat in my chest once, twice.

"Of course not. I'm happy for Allie."

I open my eyes and she's taking a sip. She doesn't look happy. She looks like a wreck, to be honest. Megan is not a pretty crier. Her eyes are swollen with tears, and mascara is smudged down

her cheeks. Allie only cries when she's mad, and it just makes her even scarier. I wonder if Megan loves that about her too.

"I'm better than this," Megan takes a nearby tissue and scrubs at her face.

"Don't you have those makeup wipes?" I ask, wanting to be helpful in some way.

"Yeah, hold on," she disappears into her bathroom.

I remember them from when Allie gave both of us makeovers. I actually liked how I looked in eyeliner. I don't want to give anyone any bright ideas that they should talk to me, though. I always try to keep it low-key in typical white-guy attire, basketball shorts and such. Once, Allie said my legs were pasty, so I got a spray tan... It wasn't that bad.

Megan comes out looking a lot better. More like a liar.

"How would you feel if I wouldn't tell you something?" It's half an accusation, half a genuine question.

"Like I do right now," Megan looks me in the eye, and I look away.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I mumble.

"Then I don't know what you're talking about," she states.

So she figured it out too. I should have known she would. She feels so much, she has a real gift for connecting to people; even if she spends most of her time pretending no one but the three of us exist. I've always admired her for that. When someone needs help, it completely transforms her. We were hiking with Allie one time, and we found a man who had fallen and broken his leg. There was no phone service where we were at, either. Allie and I got hyped up on adrenaline, but we were useless. It was Megan who talked to the guy and calmed him down. It was Megan who told us what to do. It was Megan he called later to tell how he was doing, and to thank again. Our parents never look at her long enough to see that side of her, but Allie does. And now here Megan is, denying what that means to her, because she sees that I've fallen and broken my leg too. I should tell her to go on without me, but the coyotes will start coming out of the dark and the cold soon.

"Alright, fine. If you don't want to tell me..." If she would just

tell me, I could force myself to support her, like I should. Right now, it's just too easy to ignore.

"Tell you what?" She challenges.

One more chance, Megan. "That you love Allie."

She flinches like I've just raised my fist to hit her, but says, "I don't."

She sounds just like our parents at the end of an argument I overheard them having when I was seven.

"Fine," my mom's chair screamed across the floor, "I have to go."

My dad reopened the newspaper that was still in his hands, and said, "Love you," to it.

"You too," my mom tossed over her shoulder.

"You too," my dad repeated.

They sounded like they were talking with water bottles in their mouths, the crinkling of plastic was so deafening.

They stayed together for two more years, and it made them bitter.

"Alright," I get up to leave, "Let me know if you need anything."

"Yeah, can you take that?" Megan gestures to her mug.

I pick it up. It's still almost full. "Sure," I say. "No problem."

I let the sandy syrup swirl down the drain.

Death and Dissolving Leaden Circles: Time in Mrs. Dalloway

Ally Bush

As a modernist writer, Virginia Woolf sought to expand and explode societal expectations of the novel. Using narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness to explore themes such as sanity and insanity, death, and memory in her work, Woolf achieved this goal with her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Published in 1925, just a few years after the end of World War I, this story chronicles the lives of several characters on a single June day in London. One of the prominent themes in *Mrs. Dalloway* is time. Both objective and subjective, Woolf treats the concept of time differently than Charlotte Brontë does in her novel *Jane Eyre*. Compared to time in *Jane Eyre*, time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is nonlinear. Because characters are constantly moving back in their memory and the perspective is consistently changing, objective time, as told by Big Ben, is the only way for readers (and in some cases, for the characters) to anchor themselves in this world. Interestingly, two phrases are repeated throughout the novel that always appears with the chiming of Big Ben: "First a warning; musical, then the hour; irrevocable" and "The leaden circles dissolved in the air." Through an analysis of these phrases and how they relate to Big Ben striking the hour, this paper explores the themes of death, time, and consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Two different characters say the phrase "First a warning; musical, then the hour; irrevocable," in the novel, and each time it carries a different meaning. The first time Big Ben strikes is when Clarissa has left her home to buy flowers for the party she is throwing later that night. Clarissa recognizes the moment just before Big Ben strikes and calls it "an indescribable pause; a suspense" (4). In the next line, Woolf uses a technique similar

to the to-the-moment literary strategy that appears frequently in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Once it strikes, Clarissa thinks "First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (4). In saying "First, a warning, musical," it is important to note that Clarissa uses the ambiguous "a," as in "a warning." This implies that this pause is not fully defined or perhaps that there are more than one. Interestingly, Clarissa's husband uses a similar phrase when Big Ben strikes several hours later. At 3 pm, Richard hears "Big Ben beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (117). Here, Richard uses "the" instead of "a" to think about the pause. The slight difference in these two phrases could suggest that Clarissa thinks more subjectively than her husband. Richard thinks about the moment before Big Ben strikes as *the* moment, the specific warning that the clock gives him before it tells the time. Clarissa, on the other hand, thinks of time a little differently. She calls it "a warning," as in one of many. Their differences become clear when the reader sees what immediately follows each phrase. Richard thinks that "Lunch parties waste the entire afternoon" (117). He instantly transitions from thinking about time to complaining about lunch parties. The narrative then shifts in the next sentence to Clarissa in her drawing room. Back on page 4, Clarissa, however, continues thinking about time when she says "The leaden circles dissolved in the air." This sentence follows the word "irrevocable," which suggests that the ending of the hour or the passing of time is irreversible. This theme of finality continues with the image of leaden circles dissolving in the air. More specifically, that something that once existed and Clarissa once experienced, now is no longer. This phrase and its subsequent meaning is consistent throughout the novel.

Objective time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is driven by the striking of Big Ben on the hour and half hour and more importantly, when it is done chiming. The phrase "the leaden circles dissolved in the air" appears four separate times in the novel and every time is associated with the striking of Big Ben. When Clarissa says "First a warning; musical, then the hour; irrevocable" (4) in the very beginning, she is suggesting that time is a powerful, irreversible

force. Once Big Ben strikes the hour, that hour is gone forever with the sound of the chimes. Moreover, the next line is "The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (4). This image brings to light the concept of death and the impermanence of life. With the verb "dissolved," Clarissa implies that the leaden circles are things that once existed but now do not. Similarly, the hour that has just concluded, as marked by Big Ben, will also never happen again. Woolf establishes this theme of impermanence in the very first sentence of the novel: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (1). The flowers introduced in this line are similar to time in this sense because they, too, exist for a certain period before they die. Clarissa buying flowers in the first sentence of the novel certainly was no accident; it reinforces the idea of death and impermanence with which Woolf treats time.

The next time a character refers to the leaden circles is when Peter leaves Clarissa's house. After a paragraph break, the narration shifts from Clarissa to Peter: "Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour. (The leaden circles dissolved in the air.)" (48). Interestingly, the phrase here is in parentheses, almost as if it is an afterthought. Peter goes on to think about Clarissa, how he is in love with her, and how she rejected him. While he is thinking about Clarissa, Big Ben interrupts his thoughts. Again, in parentheses, he thinks "(Still the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him; the half-hour; still early; only half-past eleven still.)" (49). By placing Peter's thoughts about time in parentheses, Woolf implies that while Clarissa is thinking about time presently and actively, Peter is not. He recognizes time just as Clarissa does, but he does so in the back of his mind. Furthermore, this could be Woolf's reminder to the reader that time has not stopped. While Peter moves the plot forward, time continues to exist outside of his actions. He is aware of its passing, but it does not affect him in the way that is does Clarissa. After the interruption of Big Ben, the narrative stays on Peter. In other cases where the clock

strikes, the perspective shifts from one character to another, but in this scene, Peter continues thinking about Clarissa. Here, Woolf demonstrates the different ways in which time can affect a person.

The next time the clock strikes is a half hour later, at 12 pm: "It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke, and died up there among the seagulls..." (94). Here, Big Ben marks a shift in the narrative from Dr. Holmes talking with Septimus and Lucrezia to Clarissa in her bedroom and finally back to Septimus and Lucrezia going to their appointment with Sir William Bradshaw. The language in this quote is consistent with other language surrounding time that suggests it can die or cease to exist. Woolf even says it "died up there among the seagulls" (94). This image, of the sound of time leaving the clock, floating through the air, and eventually dying in the sky, again symbolizes death and how something even so abstract as time can die. Then, the narrator says "twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. Twelve was the hour of their appointment" (94). Here, Woolf is describing the actions that the characters are taking while at the same time suggesting that Big Ben continues to chime. At the end of the paragraph, after the clock finishes striking twelve times, the sentence "The leaden circles dissolved in the air" finally appears (94). This sentence at the end of the paragraphs signals that the twelve chimes have stopped and that the previous hour no longer exists. The shift from Dr. Holmes to Sir William Bradshaw happens in conjunction with Big Ben striking. Moreover, Clarissa is mentioned in this paragraph. Not only does Big Ben control the shift from one subject to another, but it also widens the focus of the story for a moment to show the reader what Clarissa is doing before zeroing back in on Septimus and Rezia. In this way, objective time drives subjective time.

The last time the leaden circles are mentioned is at the end of the novel. The party is going on and Clarissa overhears the

Bradshaws talking about Septimus's suicide. This gets Clarissa thinking about death. She thinks about Septimus and it almost seems like she envies him. She thinks about her party and how everyone who is there will eventually grow old. Clarissa then realizes that Septimus figured it out: "A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance" (184). She realizes that Septimus has preserved his life by dying. The memory that everyone has of him will be frozen in time forever. Clarissa also realizes that "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (184). As someone is dying, they realize that understanding the meaning and their life's purpose is unreachable. No matter how hard Clarissa may try to feel like she belongs, death is the only way to finally figure that out. If someone is dying, the people around them fade away, the excitement of life dulls, and nothing else is left, and that person will have only themselves and the inevitability of death.

As Clarissa thinks about time, death, and other such topics, she becomes fascinated by the old lady. Clarissa is constantly surrounded by people, but the old woman she sees from her window is always alone. During her party, Clarissa decides to go to the window to look at the sky. Here, she sees the old lady and watches, rapt, and she gets ready for bed. In Clarissa's own home, her party guests are socializing in other rooms. In this moment, Big Ben strikes: "The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on" (186). She does not pity him because she sees herself in him and she cannot pity herself. All of the choices she made in her life (refusing Peter, marrying Richard, even buying the flowers herself) happened in the past and she cannot change them. As Clarissa is realizing this, "she felt somehow very like him — the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done

it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air." (186). In this passage, the last mention of the leaden circles appears. Time and death are connected yet again because they both represent endings. On one level, the hour that just happened, Clarissa will never experience it again and it therefore "dissolved" because it once existed but now it does not. On a deeper level, Clarissa might still be thinking of the choices she made in her past that have significant meaning to her present and future life. Right after Big Ben strikes this final time, the narrative shifts from Clarissa to Peter, incidentally one of her past choices.

Big Ben almost always strikes in the middle of action, interrupting the stream of consciousness that Woolf established. However, when it chimes, it usually marks a shift in narrative, thought, or action that proves that objective time (Big Ben) controls subjective time. The concepts of time and death are treated so similarly in this novel that at times, they could almost be interchangeable. Through the repetition, and therefore emphasis, of "First a warning; musical, then the hour; irrevocable" and "The leaden circles dissolved in the air," Woolf managed to write a novel that challenged the very concept of what a novel is. Truly a modernist writer, Virginia Woolf took society's expectations of the novel and dissolved them in the air.

Work Cited

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Urine Therapy

Natalie Murphy

Your own piss is so acidic that if you try to drink it for the first time, you'll probably spray it out of your mouth like a sneeze. Second time you can hold it in a little longer. Third time it feels a little like vodka burning its way down your throat.

Turn on an interview with a celebrity, they'll tell you about that time their Mama gave them a lesson about the value of love through a burnt jambalaya in their southern kitchen. You want a real lesson about life from your mother?

I was thirteen, reading Marlowe's Doctor Faustus for my English lit class at the kitchen table the morning Mom decided to start urine therapy. She reached into the cabinet to find a clean glass, mumbling about "reading this thing online," that "cleans out toxins and kills parasites caused by processed food."

My head was more in the scene on the page, so I didn't quite register what was happening till she went to the bathroom and came back to the table with a glass full of yellow fluid.

"- so it acts like a detoxifier," she continued, and took a big gulp, her skinny, tendon- bulging throat shivering and her eyes watering. She spat it back into the glass for a moment, did her ujjayi yoga breath and then chugged the whole thing down like a sweet glass of coke.

Shut your television off. This is the best lesson you'll ever learn. Life is drinking your own piss.

Snap back to now. It's been nine years. I'm driving my mother's head into a slick ballroom floor and it's the most satisfying thing I've ever done. Fist full of salt and pepper ringlets, knees already burning from the friction on the waxed wood. One more time. One more. Start hitting someone and try to stop. Take your first breath and try to hold it.

She's grappling my arm but it's a few more hits and lights out. What's measles? What's brain trauma? What's a slit down your scalp? What's a glass full of piss?

My brother Dean's just staring with his big black eyes. Dad's still downing one champagne glass and holding another, but I can see the corner of his mouth lifting. Dean's new wife, Annie Mary Marie Magdalene looks at Dean and then gives me the same stare. Here's one more lesson: vaccinate your children.

I'm upside down on the pole with one tit in the air on the day Dean invites me to his wedding, and the last thing I'm expecting to see is my own brother standing at the doorway. But, he's there, and then I'm on the stage floor, and it's either head trauma or whatever I snorted off Sandi's eyeshadow palette that's making my vision turn to a complete blur. I move the bikini triangle back over my chest and try to sit up at the edge of the stage. It's been three years, and with the woman standing just slightly behind him with a shit brown Louis shoulder bag and her knees locked together like she might catch something in here, I already know what he's about to ask me.

My boss Vester's leaning over the mic at the DJ booth and giving me a stare that says *get off the stage*. He announces Sandi's entrance and she still has white around her nose when she pulls off her skirt.

So, I meet Dean at the doorway where he's very ruffled in his cream sweater and Rolex watch and he gets right to the point and says, "I'm getting married."

He introduces the woman beside him who's name is some generic bastardization of Anna with three tacked on middle names and I don't have the heart to ask him to repeat it. The woman smiles on cue. Her little nose crinkles and the deep cuts in her cheekbones hollow, and oh, I know this wife will definitely help Dean feel normal.

House, check. Complacent wife, check. Gas guzzling truck, check.

"So," his eyes drift for a moment because it's what they'll

do in a place like this. One with hollering men with their jowls jiggling, girls with rashes on their knees, Vester shoving the DJ, and the bartender lifting her *Rolling Stones* t-shirt. "I would really love if you'd come."

Showing up at Dean's wedding is the least I can do. The absolute least. When I left home and got set up at *The Bachelor's Lounge* I changed my number, address, social media, deleted myself off the face of the earth, and called Dean off a payphone and told him he could find me at this club down the dark side of the city if he ever needed me.

So, Jesus, if he shows up and he needs me to make him feel like he's doing life right, what am I supposed to do? The absolute least.

Just from the way he's smiling and thanking me and saying I "didn't even need to bring a gift or anything," I already know he's inviting Mom too.

And just the thought of her takes me back to the hospital smell during what was supposed to be my 8th grade graduation. I was choking on my own mucus, red with the measles while my mother screamed at the doctors that if they injected me with any poison she'd take their asses to federal court. Few years down the line, I got the chickenpox– then the shingles. Nearly died of a few allergic reactions to the soy milk my mother forced down my throat with vegan cookies.

What's a little measles? What's a 103 fever? What's a little taste of death if I'm an organic freshly grown non-GMO kid?

Dean got his vaccinations. Dean wasn't in hospital with mucus coming out of every orifice. Dad only gave up and let mom do what she wanted when she had me. By that time he was either at the firm working for the money my mom spent on private school and snake oil or draped over his living room chair, reclined back with a steady dribble of whiskey and saliva running down his chin. Your wife can't take you to the anti-vaxxer parent meeting if you're unconscious 24/7.

Start getting used to being sick, sick will start finding you. When I hit senior year, I got HPV before I got into any colleges. And then I didn't get into any colleges, but I got Herpes too. So,

I don't know, I guess that evens out.

Get diagnosed with not one but two lifelong STDs and that's the tallest glass of piss you'll ever drink.

It's a slippery slope from there. You've got your STDs and your rickety raw vegan body and suddenly men start making you feel like you're not the type of girl they want to impregnate and enslave. Then you're at an audition at *The Bachelor's Lounge*, the classy strip club– because you're classy– in a mismatched bra and a pair of cotton underwear you got in a Macy's 5-pack on clearance. You get the job because the big hunk of muscle and scars running the joint says he likes your smile– and your ass. And hey, look at me. That's when it gets better.

Try to tell me about an office job where you show up black out drunk on Pinot Grigio and your boss starts shoving 100's into your bra because you're pretty. Tell me the last time you pulled down your nursing bra and your baby threw a dollar at you.

They'll try to tell you you're the wrong kind of girl, but the right type of girl– the one standing next to my brother in a floral print dress with a bag silhouette– isn't any different. She'll spend years with bursting bellies and breasts full of milk, and he'll come to girls like me when he gets bored of the right kind of girl. Because the right kind of girl is the one that's convenient.

So with Dean standing there, it's clear what his checklist has evolved into. Teenaged Dean's checklist? Drink the piss, do the water fast, get the reiki healing session and get the fuck out before your mother starts making you swallow rose quartz.

And now? Get your stripper sister to go to your wedding, invite your alcoholic father but don't have an open bar at the reception, get your mother to light a candle at a church, impregnate Anna Mary Quite Contrary, keep your head down, don't think about the void.

What can I say? I'm a good sister. So, I go.

It would've been fine if Dean didn't decide to have that goddamn afterparty. The ceremony in the church? Stupid, sure, I mean there's no other way to describe anything that goes on

in a church. But, it was fine. And the reception was fine too. Because even though our parents were there, I could sit on the other end of the room and pretend they weren't.

But it's 1:30AM, I'm shrugging my thrift store fur on and half the guests have already gone when I notice Dean charging forward with Mom and Dad on his right side and his new wife trailing behind. And my mother is full of gray hair and wrinkles and she looks like a urinary tract infection.

"Cara," Dean says when he reaches me. "There's a– well, I organized an afterparty. Just for us family." My dad snatches a half-empty champagne glass off a nearby table and gulps it down.

My Mom's just standing there with her dried out mouth tight and pursed.

For a moment I don't know what to say. I don't know so much that it must show on my face, and Dean takes that as a reply and responds.

"I know, I know. But, please. Can we be a family just for today?" And he looks at me like he did when we had to eat 800 calories of kale, when we both ended up with kidney failure from a 14 day water fast, when we both had to pee into a cup and sit in front of it at the dining room table. Like two soldiers going into combat.

Dean ends up driving all of us to this art gallery down the eclectic side of town where he's rented out a little ballroom with some drinks and a few oddly designed modern couches. Anne of Green Gables has found a way to distract my mother by talking to her about that hot yoga session she went to last week at the Y. Dad's got his drink, so he's occupied.

It's when I hear Mom tell Anna Banana Fofana that she's "looking to adopt" that my blood runs cold.

"It gets lonely," she says, nodding with herself. "Two adult children and I hardly get to see them."

"Oh," the Wife's face twists and she places a hand over my mother's.

"I just want to look after someone who will *appreciate it*." And with the last two words she shifts her head in my direction.

I nearly scream.

I'm back in the hospital bed with my eyes glued shut and my nose stuffed up with mucus; I'm shivering in the corner of my room because I've only been given water for 10 days. There's only one time people ever get the excuse to deck someone across the face. You can become a cop and do it a few times a day. Greg from HR, on the other hand, has to wait his whole life for that chance. I think, this is it. This is the time. Jesus. Roll the carpet out and book the priest, it's my special day.

First I kick her chair and her body moves with the momentum.

"Hey," She says.

"Hey," I say, and shove her out of the seat.

"Hey, hey, hey," Dean joins in now.

I think I hear Dad mumble a "hey" too before I strike my mother across the face.

You've got an important decision to make when you first drink your own piss: which direction you're going to spray it out of your mouth. First time, there was a patchouli oil infuser smoking in the center of the table. I was thirteen, just home from school with the pee I held in from that morning all served in the glass in front of me.

What's a burning sensation all the way down your throat? What's ingesting your own waste? What's the worst thing you've ever had to do?

"You've got to drink it when it's fresh," she said.

And I took a big mouthful, cheeks expanded before my eyes teared up and I had to spit it out somewhere. So I let it spray right into my Mom's shriveled up face.

Are you listening? Keep your television off. There's one more thing I've got to tell you. Life may be drinking your own piss, but sometimes you get to spit it out.

I tackle her bony body to the ground and I'm almost sure it rattles when we hit the ballroom floor. And now, I'm here, and I can't decide whether to shatter her nose or put a dent in her skull. So, I just take a fistful of her hair and start banging it on

the ground till her face looks like mine when I had measles.

No one's moving, they're only looking. When are you gonna get a show like this again in your life? I hear the occasional "hey" from the audience but it gets weaker with every blow to the ground.

"You ungrateful piece of–" She claws at my arm. Bang. That one's for the piss.

"How dare you–"

Bang. That one's for the kidney failure.

"I am your *mother*–"

Bang. That's for the measles.

Which vaccination do you avoid to stop your daughter from slamming your skull into the

floor?

And then it's lights out. Her body goes limp so I know she's passed out, and I unclench

my fist from her hai

Dad's giggling like he's got something stuck in his throat. He's got to put his sweaty glass down because the guy's laughing so hard. And laughter's as contagious as measles, so I start laughing too. And then for a moment I see Dean's face twitch, and it might just be because he's married, but he cracks a smile.

Turn on your television. Sling a big bottle of Jack Daniels at it and watch it go up in flames. Trust me. It makes the piss a bit easier to swallow.

Ms. Betty Davis plays an important role in the cafeteria here on campus, and works hard to keep things running for the students. She has worked at Queens for over 40 years.

Ms. Betty
Juliana Amos

Paris is Always a Good Idea

Olivia Arnold

Hamburg City Hall

Lauren Cassidy

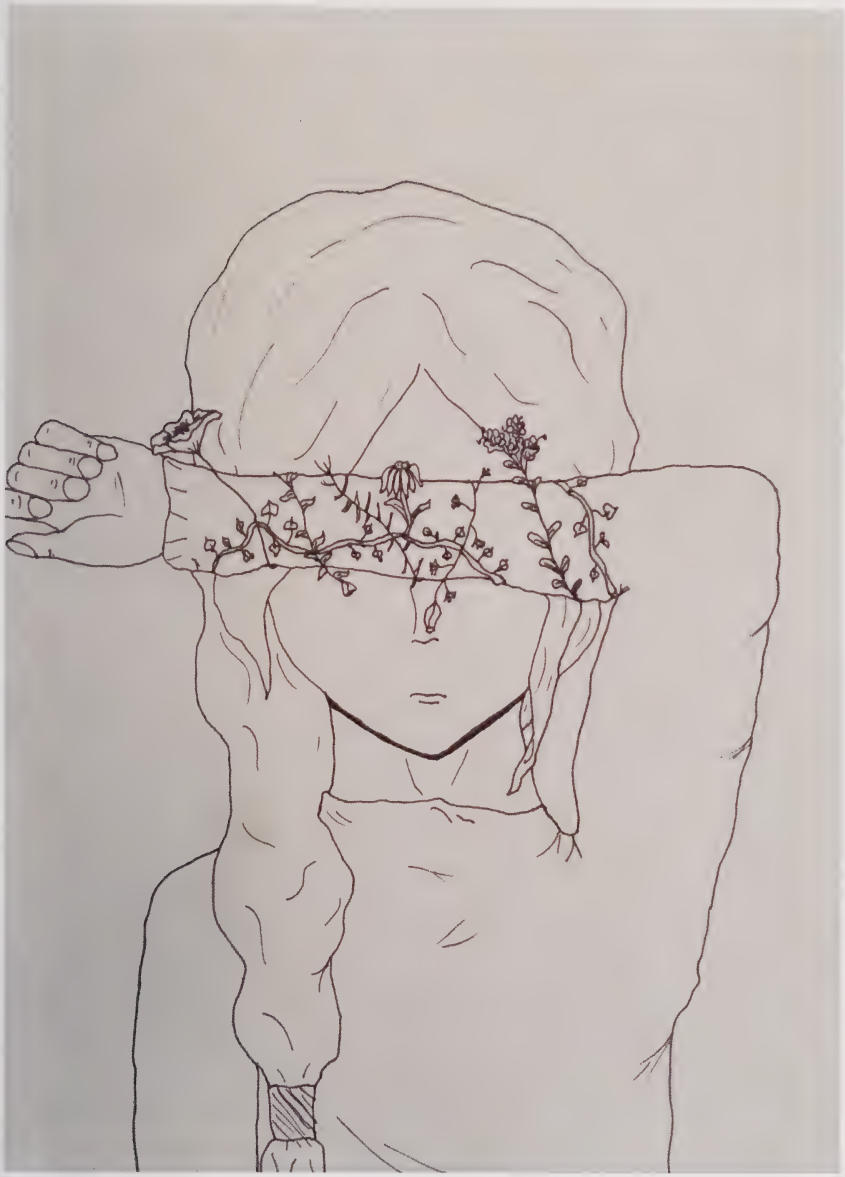
Sea of Fog
Olivia Arnold

Constitution Hill
Olivia Arnold

Prague I
Tereza Zimovjanova

The Climb
Anthony Raftis

Grace Chammas
Grace Chammas



Cover Me in Wildflowers
SJ Atkinson

Tower of London
Kendra Post

London Calling
Olivia Arnold

Prague II
Tereza Zimov̇anova

Little Nightscapes
Lauren Cassidy

Sunrise on Oak Island
Lauren Cassidy

Venetian Marble
Olivia Arnold

Aare River
Lauren Cassidy

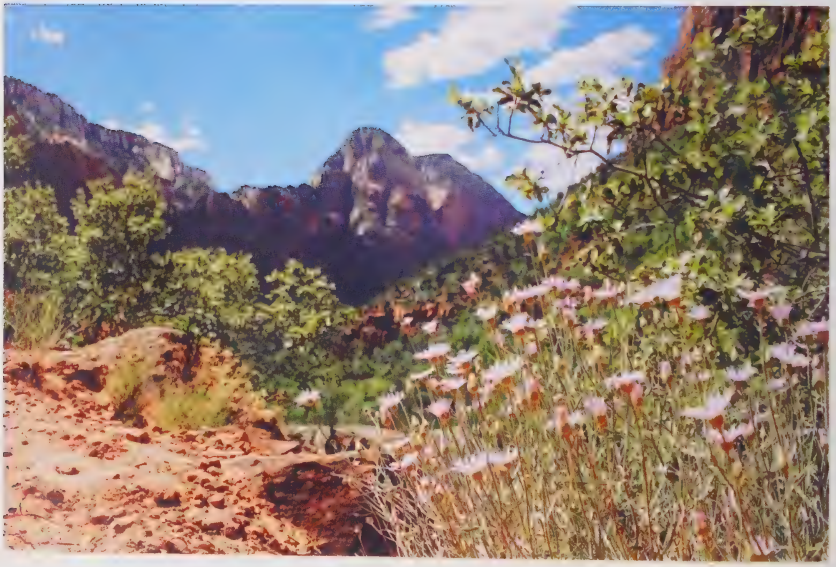
Sunrise on Campus
Ashlyn Main

Prague III
Tereza Zimovjanova

Rainbow in a River
Chioma Ngene

Evermore
Elisabeth King

Prague IV
Tereza Zimovjanova



Flowers at Zion
Ashlyn Main

Plastic Paradox
Ashleigh Fitch

Balanced Rocks
Ashlyn Main

Oro
Nia Murat

Girlfriends
Raegan Ferro-Gaskin

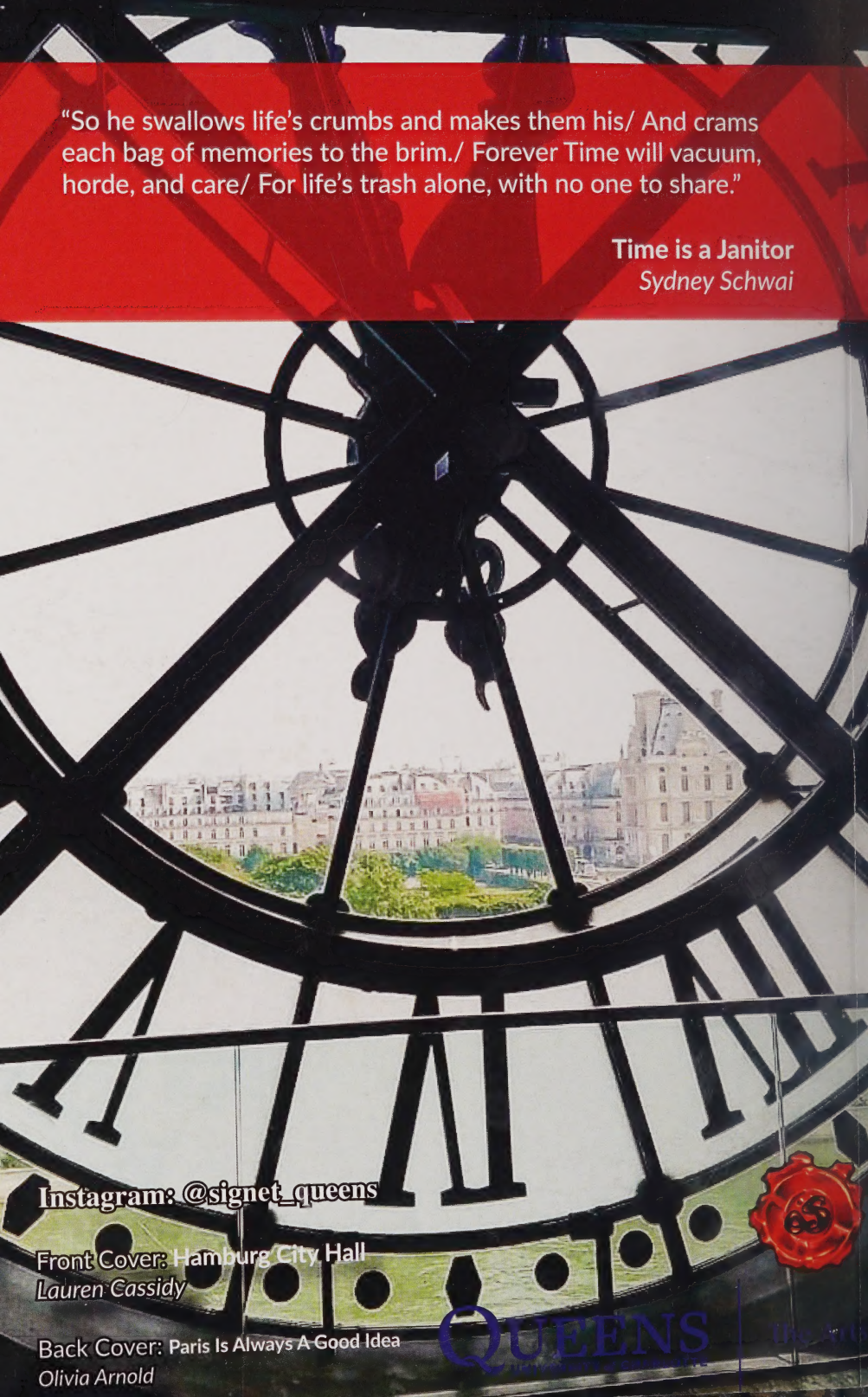
2 Buddies
Devin Bailey

Queens Campus
Devin Bailey

We don't all live in huts!
Chioma Ngene

"So he swallows life's crumbs and makes them his/ And crams each bag of memories to the brim./ Forever Time will vacuum, horde, and care/ For life's trash alone, with no one to share."

Time is a Janitor
Sydney Schwai



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Lauren Cassidy

Back Cover: **Paris Is Always A Good Idea**
Olivia Arnold

QUEENS
UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE